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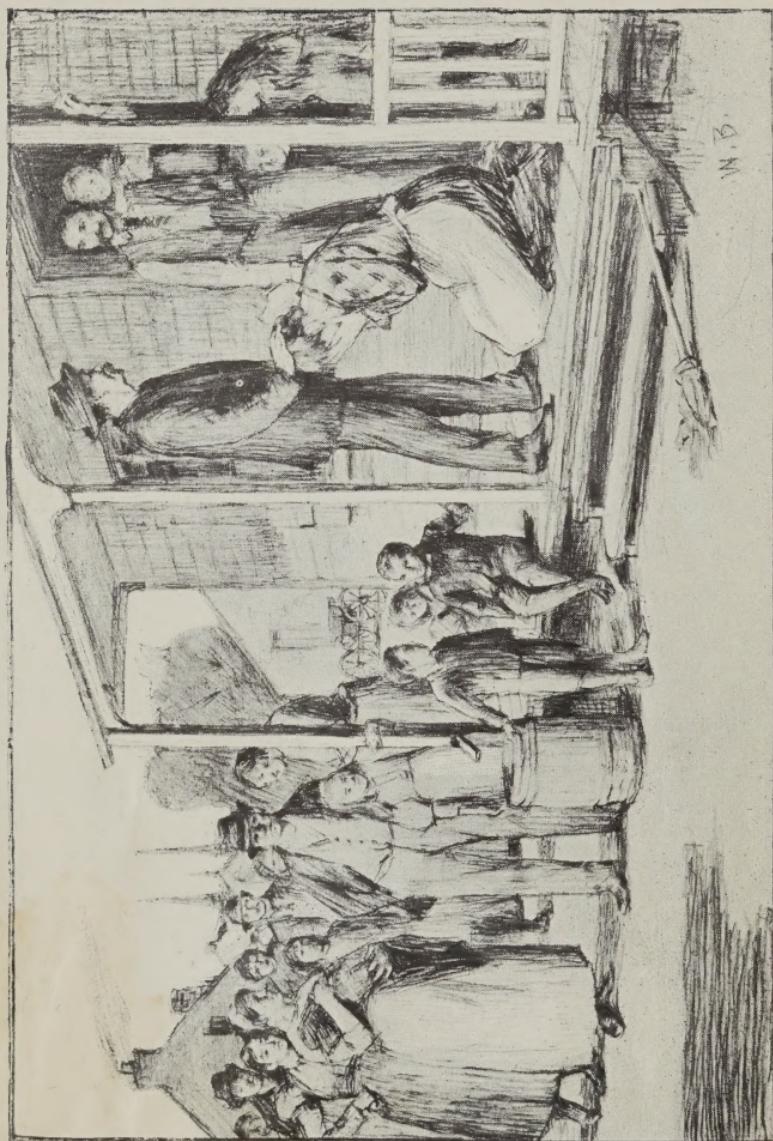
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"Then he stopped, a shadow fell upon his soul" —p. 27.

# BONHOMME

FRENCH-CANADIAN STORIES AND SKETCHES.

BY

HENRY CECIL WALSH.

WITH

TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILLIAM BRYMNER, R.C.A.



TORONTO:

WILLIAM BRIGGS,

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TO THE  
FIRST READERS AND CRITICS OF THESE  
STORIES

*My Parents*

DO I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE  
THIS BOOK.

79592



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## THE HOMECOMING OF OVIDE BOUCHETTE.

### I.

OVIDE BOUCHETTE, short, stocky, and fiercely tanned, was back from the Nile expedition. He had some comments, and a few complaints, to make upon his trip abroad. From being a back-woodsman, rafting logs on the Upper Gatineau, he had laid down his oar and canting-hook to serve Her Britannic Majesty's Government in one of the uttermost ends of earth—and, incidentally, to see the world. Now, as a *voyageur*, he had returned from piloting the British past the Nile cataracts, prepared to open the eyes of his neighbors. They might believe him, and again they might not. If the latter, then there was the satisfaction of knowing that he had three hundred fellow-*voyageurs* to bear him out in his statements.

At home he had ruled as the head of the house, but in Egypt, in the stern of a boat, he had as absolutely ruled some of the British army as if he, a god, had descended from the clouds to do it. And of all he had to relate, Ovide felt that this last fact took the lead.

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Next in importance was the naked, unalterable truth that he never could get enough onions to eat. Ovide had seen strange countries, strange sights, and still stranger people, and dwelt among historical and classical antiquities that others, sighing to see, only saw in plain or illustrated text. He had navigated half the globe to the land of mummies ; viewed ruins that were old when the ancients deemed the world square, and omitted the Western Hemisphere from their maps ; marked prowling jackals as the only living things, animal or vegetable, indigenous to baked, barren and forbidding spots, that were said to have once blossomed like the rose, and to have displayed the visible indications of a great people ; passed the tombs of kings who reigned so long ago that the Pyramids, the Sphinx, the Temple of Karnak, Hindu mysticism, and Grecian mythology are, in comparison, recent institutions ; and, finally, beheld the Orient proffer the details of scenes, and flirt the colors, that only one zone of earth can. But the commissariat was weak in Quebec onions and tobacco, and Ovide's interest in his surroundings waned with the dwindling of his private supply of *shag*. When at last his stock was exhausted, he got from Guillaume ; and when Guillaume's ran out, every Canadian was hugging his little. There was plenty of other tobacco, but to Ovide it lacked body ; and had the Government not urgently needed him just

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then, he would have bartered his travels and pay for home again, where, at least, he could smoke tobacco that *was* tobacco, and sit down to onions whenever he wanted to.

And now his feet pressed a road that would lead him past onions enough to give the whole British army a breath. The thought exhilarated! Onions, and *patrie! tabac quesnel* and satisfaction! these were synonymous terms to Ovide. At last his eyes glisten; here are plots of tobacco—a joyful sight; and there whole cartloads of red and white onions afield, pulled and wrung and laid out in long rows to dry.

Ovide had regained his Paradise. A few minutes more would give him his first glimpse of the village wherein, many months before, he had left his wife and little ones. Anticipation bubbled him into song, and he broke forth into—

A la claire fontaine  
M'en allant promener,  
J'ai trouvé l'eau si belle  
Que je m'y suis baigné.

*I' ya longtemps que je t'aime,  
Jamais je ne t'oublierai.*

Back in the bosom of his family again, and among old acquaintances once more, Ovide felt would be an incommunicable thankfulness. Having aided the warring of his Empire in a remote

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quarter of the globe, he was now entering upon the best part of his reward. He had coquettled with grave dangers without mishap, which could not be said of all his compatriots who had sailed with him from these shores. There was much to hear, tell, and feast the eyes upon, and to delay the coming of such blessed moments was not to Ovide's purpose.

The Sunday morning was a smoky one in early October, a blue drift from bush-fires thinly veiling the landscape. The air was warm, the sky serene, and a condition of aromatic stillness prevailed.

Ovide gained the top of the hill, and, after a short stretch, began descending the other side of it. Past the convent appeared the parish cross. Upon reaching it he, crossing himself, knelt in brief and silent prayer. Through the trees, on rising, he could now partly discern the village a third of a mile away—a single street of unpretentious dwellings, over-branched by red, green and yellow foliage, and surrounded by the orchards and fields which had yielded according as the Lord allowed them. Encompassing all, finally—in contrast to the hard ochreous tints of Egypt—Ovide for an instant saw a wide sloping reach of country, fielded like a checkerboard, dotted with old colonial farm-houses, dressed in the gold and green and crimson hues of autumn, and bounded by a bright streak—the silvering Ottawa—and the far-off, low-looking, purple Laurentian mountains beyond.

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With a glad heart made gladder by the sight, Ovide hastened on. Egyptian memories recurred to him unreally—he could recall nothing but the yearning of sweating days and nights, when, homesick and tried by the heat, he, among other things, had sighed for the cool of his native land again. And here not only was he back in it, but on the point of being restored to all that was dear to him.

It was the hour of High Mass, and few were to be seen about. As he passed the old stone church, the organ muffled to him from within its recesses ; while almost immediately after, in front of Vénance Godin's place, a table-slapping behind closed shutters told him that a game of cards was in progress. Continuing on, he kicked a stone out of his path, and paused before Pascal's house—a low wooden, time-stained one with a red door and two green board shutters. The croquetting of balls sounded from the rear, and, anxious as he was to see and embrace his family again, Ovide could not resist the temptation to go in. At the corner of the yard and lane he halted unnoticed, everyone being that intent on the game. Ovide rapidly noted the details of a familiar scene : the swept yard, the men in their shirt-sleeves, and the short-handled, long-headed mallets they used. No women were seen, nor were they missed, as the pastime was wholly masculine, and about the only one of its kind the French-Canadians indulge in.

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Beyond the bare patch of ground where the game was on, a few cabbages and a row of celery were all that remained of the kitchen-garden. Nearer the house, and piled unprotected in a corner, three sleighs—one for wood, a box-sleigh, and a common brown *berlot*—were thus disposed of till winter. Exactly opposite, a failing “lean-to” housed, among a collection of the miscellaneous, a buggy, a grindstone, a coil of fence wire, and the glass and frames of a few hot-beds, beneath a sagging roof that upheld a forkful of pea-straw and a discarded ash-sifter. A small sowing of dried cornstalks occasionally crackled to passing breezes; and on a dilapidated fence hung some cotton cloths, whose precise shade and use would be hard to define. A grey flannel shirt dangled from the clothes-line, out of the way of the players; a plough rusted behind one of the white-washed sheds; and not far from the windlass-well, on the top member of a heap of discarded railroad ties, a few tomatoes ripened. Recumbent upon the greenest spot thereabouts—where the dishwater was thrown—a fury black and white Spitz dog, watching the game and the near scratching of some common fowls, raised a head from between its paws, sniffed, growled, and then jumped up, barking fiercely at Ovide. The introduction was both complete and startling. Instead of the hearty greeting the latter expected, a drop-jawed amazement regarded him. Then a

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Backing away followed, first one and then another, till all, finally, were on the move, here and there tripping over a hoop or dropping a mallet, and blankly staring at the amused new-comer over pipes on which their teeth had suddenly set.

“Don’t you know me?” and the speaker smiled more than ever at the discomfiture he had created. “I am Ovide, come home again.”

But his only answer at first was a continuation of the same affrighted, mystified silence that had set in the moment the rest became aware of his presence. Then, next—by way of tardy reply—a tomato spattered against the water-spout emptying into the rainwater barrel beside him, the unseen work of Médéric. Ovide’s bearing changed with a start; his smiling vanished into bewilderment, and this, in turn, was swallowed up by resentment.

“If that was meant for me,” he now sarcastically said, divided between anger and wonder, “the thrower lacks as much in manners as in aim. Is it for this that I, Ovide Bouchette, have put ten thousand miles behind me, travelling day and night to do it, that I might the sooner be with you again? *Sacré cœur!* I might as well have stayed in Egypt and saved my feelings. I thought I was back among friends, and turned aside from my homeward brisking for a moment to take you by the hand, and say that in all I saw, nothing so stirred me as the sights of this day. But no; as

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it is things are the other way. It is plain to you who I am ; my face, my voice, my name you know—are they not the same as of old? And yet you shun me, hurl at me, and stare at me as though your tongues were out. *C'est bien!* we are all men of an age that means. I am from the land of lepers, and you treat me as one. I, therefore, Ovide Bouchette, of sound mind and body, will act as one, and go. I forbear with you ; I neither complain of nor question your behavior ; but it will take much, let me tell you, to wipe out the reproach of this day among you. My welcome yet awaits me ; and what is fitter than that home should first pronounce it! *Au revoir! mes Africains !*"

Ovide had no trouble to express himself—as fast as he could frame the words they fell from his lips. Then, smarting under the extraordinary sense of injury done him, and with his former exulting air wholly dissipated, he, with a slight, stiff bow and a half-military, half-civil salute—sternly puzzled over his queer, unaccountable reception, that none should answer him, all stare, and one even fling at him—turned and left with a precision that suggested the martial atmosphere out of which he had just come.

As he next strode along the road, in plain view of all, Médéric recovered sufficiently to stammer out :

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“Stop, Ovide! *Mon Dieu!* not so fast! Hold on till we explain. I took it I threw at your ghost, not you. The news came that you were dead—drowned!”

But if Ovide heard, he paid no attention—perhaps he heard without comprehending; and of the scene that next ensued among the others, he was equally oblivious.

### II.

HALTING before a grey wooden cottage of two stories, with a side flight of steps leading to the upper part, Ovide, after a moment's eager scrutiny, opened the gate and walked in.

The skimpy piece of ground between the house and road was neat when he left it, but now he returned to find it in a weedy tangle, littered with leaves, and testifying in general to utter neglect. The house, too, seemed ill-at-ease for appearing as it did, with closed blinds, dusty, weather-stained steps and veranda, and an air, on the whole, of complete inaction.

Without knowing why, Ovide began to feel uncomfortable himself, and after a second's hesitation he refrained from entering by the front way, and passed to the rear. The state of things there, he found, was even more unfamiliar. The sheds were open to inspection, and contained nothing but rubbish; while the yard simply tendered to sight

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a few of the year's last lingering wild flowers—golden-rod and sow-thistles, white feverfew, white and blue cornflowers, and white and purple asters—some empty cans, a grassed heap of stone, a bottomless washpan, and a broken-down sawhorse. No other signs of life were visible; and with an odder sensation at heart than ever, Ovide now tried the door of the small summer-kitchen he had himself set up. And even as he shook it, and found it locked, he could not help curiously speculating upon the chances of the tall chimney above—topped by a tile drainpipe, and so incongruously big compared with the tiny extension it served—falling down upon him or not. However, it stood; and after trying every door and window within reach, only to find them locked and fastened too, Ovide, thoroughly puzzled, returned to the front again, and sat down on the steps to think things over.

They were at church, he told himself, and must be waited for. At the most they were gone on a visit, and all he had to do was to find out where and follow. The spring birds were back again, on their way south, but not even the glad promises of the *rossignol* could prevent Ovide's heart from sinking. Then, as he clave to hopes and strove to put away fears, he became aware of the croquet-players at Pascal's—now swelled to double their number in men, women and children—coming up the road in a body. Ovide experienced a thrill at the sight;

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he instinctively knew that they sought him, and with news. But what kind of news attracted together like this, or sent so many tramping through the white dust of a green-edged road to hear it told? That they came for more than merely to see him, Ovide felt suddenly and uneasily positive; and whilst he thus debated within himself—his uneasiness growing as the others approached—the crowd arrived and halted in front of the house, some immediately pressing up to the fence, and low tones running amongst them all. Pascal himself was there—a strapping fine man of forty, both pleasant to know and look upon—who, out of the midst of barefooted children, men in their fresh white shirt-sleeves, and women drawn from cooking Sunday dinners, at once appeared and walked up to the gate.

“Ovide,” said he from there, “we are come to make amends, and to welcome you back among us. Médéric is here; he asks your forgiveness for what he did. But he threw, as we all thought, not at flesh, but at a spirit; for the report long ago reached us that you were drowned, trying to save one of the English.”

Ovide got up from the steps, and at the gate warmly grasped Pascal by the hand.

“Say no more,” he replied; “the mistake is an all-round one. ‘Twas out of Alcide Bourette’s boat, not mine, that the officer fell. Alcide could no more

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swim than fly, yet he jumped in after him. But, *sacré!* that was after the tobacco gave out. I have much to relate, but I must first hear of my wife and children. Why is the house closed and no one about? You are come to tell me—answer."

"How do you know I am come to tell you?" asked the other, with a start.

"Because," and opening the gate Ovide passed out of it, "no man can go away, die, and return, to find his home deserted and his neighbors seeking him in a body, without more than one cause at work. This house is mine, and paid for. Behind it can be grown enough vegetables to last the family a year. Should I die, my wife and children are that much provided for. Why should they move, then, and pay rent? My wife would not leave without cause; what took her?"

This loosened the women's voices, one calling to Pascal.

"Pascal," warned his wife, "you shall not!"

"*Comment?*" he queried; "I shall not what?"

"Answer him as he asks."

"And why not?" demanded Ovide.

But Madame Daoust would say no more, and left Sophie Groulx to speak for her.

"Because," this person plucked up courage to respond, "he has no right!"

Ovide swallowed, and looked around. The trees dripped painted leaves in the morning light, and

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the earth spelled GOD in dress and color. Ovide struggled with anger, and conquered it.

“With none to direct me,” he now appealed, “how am I to find my own again? I go away—I sweat for my country in a land of heat—I return with a heart quickening towards you—at Pascal’s you rebuff me—I push on to find my house desolate and shut against me—I sit down to puzzle things out—you follow, offering old friendship back and protesting a mistake—and then when my yearning would learn from you why I find myself as I do, and where my wife and little ones are, you again rebuff me. If there is mercy among you, tell me—is my wife dead, and what of my children?”

The tears were in Ovide’s eyes as he finished, and more than one apron was raised among the women. Pascal blew his nose, and sought the eye of his wife, trusting to her sex more than his own to meet the occasion.

“No, no, Ovide; not that,” someone called out. “They are all alive and well.”

Ovide instantly changed. “Then,” he sharply said, “I refuse to be trifled with like this. My desire is before you; grant it, or go. Prospère” (as the glances of the two met), “I did you a good turn once; tell me, where is my wife?”

Prospère Lachance visibly squirmed. “*Maudit-  
verrat!*” he swore, with diving glances about him, “is there no one here but me to answer Ovide?”

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For a count of ten no one spoke, Ovide awaiting reply, and Prospère manifestly troubled.

Once more Ovide struggled with anger and mastered it. Raising an arm, he pointed down the road.

“Go,” he said, addressing them all; “go, before I forget myself. Twice have I overcome my temper for your sakes, but I cannot answer for a third attempt. Grave mischief is surely lashing your conduct. You are driven, not led —”

“— The very word!” Prospère shouted from the heights of relief. “Led—lead; why did we not think of it before! Here, you,” he continued, to young Edmond, jerking him from the fence, “lead us to where Hector and Dominique” (Ovide’s children), “and Leon and Adelaide and the rest of them live.”

Much as the others might approve of and applaud the thought and act, young Edmond resented both —Prospère hurt, and, besides, dropped him his apple.

“Show the way yourself,” he retorted; “you know it as well as I do,” and wriggling free he started to run. But the rest unexpectedly closed in on him, and, passed from one to the other, he was straightway shoved to the front again. There, with prods, and without choice, the boy was kept and started, leader of Ovide, first of thirty; Edmond beginning on another apple, Ovide at his heels in

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wonder, and the remainder—as if unwilling, and yet unable to stay behind—bringing up the rear in a straggle, and all moving off to the lowing of one of Isaïe's herd.

In which manner Ovide Bouchette, back from Egypt, returned to his family.

### III.

THE spire of the parish church cast a noon shadow when the company shortly drew up in front of Ferdinand Moreau's house.

Three years prior to this, Ferdinand had lost his wife ; and although in his prime, and fairly prosperous as a market-gardener, he had since remained a widower.

Young Edmond threw away the core of the apple, drew a sleeve across his mouth, and pointed to the door.

“ You will find them in there,” he said ; and with the last word on his lips, the door was hastily opened, and Hector, Ovide's eldest child, nimbly bolted out, followed by his wrathful mother with a mop-stick. Hector had upset a pail of soft water ; and while he made good use of his legs to outstrip a drubbing, they could not put him beyond a torrent of abuse.

In which manner Ovide, back from Egypt, was introduced to his family again.

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The house abutted on the street, and at the sight of those outside, the woman stopped; but Hector's momentum carried him to the ground in a jump—clearing the few steps at a bound—and fairly into the midst of the new-comers, before he could check himself. In a trice Ovide had the astonished boy on a shoulder, and mounted the steps with him.

“*Femme ! Emélie !*” he gaily cried, waving his cap, “here is your Ovide back again, in time for Hector's forgiveness! Some smacks are better than others, and Hector foregoes his that I may take mine from the lips. Eh, wife, what do you say? Is all well?” and setting his boy down with a hearty kiss, he next bestowed a sounding one on the mother.

But instead of returning clasp for clasp, and greeting him with fervor, the latter, on the contrary, weakly put him from her with a shudder, and then sank down upon her knees, where, in the name of Mary, she besought God to have pity on her.

“You have two fathers now,” young Edmond observed to young Hector; “one with horses, and one with money,” and he took another look at the quarter—an immense sum—Ovide had given him. “*Bon Dieu !* you ought to have no end of a good time between them.”

Hector ran a critical eye over his parent, and

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then sat down with his legs hanging over the edge of the veranda.

“One is plenty,” he decided. “When it comes to two to whip”—but feeling that his punishment was only delayed, not averted, the disengaging movement his mother here made out of her husband’s arms caused him to take to the ground for a safer position beside Edmond.

But so overjoyed was Ovide to find his wife, when he had begun to suspect her dead, that he mistook her distress for thankfulness, heard nothing of the comments his son and Edmond made, and in a like manner was also unconscious of the growing crowd and hubbub behind him.

This last was now responsible for Ferdinand’s appearance. Without collar or tie, and in his shirt-sleeves, like most of the men in the street, he pattered to the door in a pair of home-made slippers, his pipe lit, and with Saturday’s paper from town in a hand. One glance was enough. To espy Ovide, at the very first poke of his head, so powerfully clamped his jaws together that the bowl half of his clay pipe dropped and broke on the sill with a bitten stem ; the same force at work within clenching his hands shut and crumpling the paper.

“*Bon jour ! Bon jour !*” Ovide exclaimed in high spirits and an equally high voice, extending a big hand as he spoke. “Aha ! we always said you had

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too large a heart to marry again, Ferdinand, and now you have proved it. One's neighbors are a sly lot sometimes. I make a dear request, and do you suppose they will grant it? Not much! I find my family not at home, and inquire about them, but they wink behind my back without a word. The next I know they have captured little Edmond to lead me here, that they might enjoy my surprise at the truth. And now that I have found it out, I cannot blame them for withholding the pleasant news from me. Ah, Ferdinand" (slapping him on the shoulder), "it is few men that would take care of another man's wife and children while he was away as you have mine. I cannot express all there is of thanks in my heart towards you, but the act is one that must ever weigh with me should anything come between us. I can say no more, I am so glad—so glad to see everybody, to hear the sounds of my birthplace, and to be back among you all with my wife and children again, knowing that the longings I had in a far-away land are being granted at last."

Ovide occasionally patted the head of his wife during this little speech, and partly addressed himself to Ferdinand and partly to the people. Before its conclusion his wife was in tears, and by the time he finished she was rocking to and fro upon her knees, with great catching sobs, like to one in the bitterest of grief. Ovide tried to lift her head out

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of her hands, and to raise her up and comfort her, but neither one nor the other could he effect, she remaining bowed and as though nailed to the boards on which she knelt. Unable to make it out, Ovide, in some distress, turned to Ferdinand. But his mystification only increased to note this person standing spellbound in the doorway, with a drawn, even ghastly, face. Indeed, instead of Ferdinand coming to his aid, the probabilities were the reverse; and a parching now lodged in Ovide's throat that reminded him of days in Egypt. Producing his handkerchief, he wiped his face—not that it needed it—and turned to those in the street. Their numbers had greatly increased, and on every face he read nothing but sympathy. Among the women, in addition, not a few were crying—some making no effort to conceal it, and some surreptitiously poking an eye with an apron.

“Why does your mother weep?” young Edmond asked of Hector.

“Because my father would not let her at me.”

“But,” the first persisted, “why does your other father not do something?”

Hector thought for a moment. “I guess it's because he's afraid,” he at length reasoned. “You see, my first father has been helping soldiers to fight.”

“That may be,” Edmond answered, “but how is he alive again? They said he was dead.”

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“I suppose he died only for a little while,” Hector replied. “I once asked my father Ferdinand why chickens came out of eggs when the hen sat on them, and he said they were hatched with heat. And my mother told us, when my father Ovide went away, that he was gone to a hot, hot country, hotter than here in the summer time; and so, when the enemy killed him, the heat just hatched him out again.”

Ovide, by an effort, slowly withdrew the gaze he had given his neighbors, and turned to his wife and Ferdinand again.

Much as they had been thrown together in the past, Ovide had never once remarked Ferdinand discomfited. But so far had composure now deserted the latter, that the contemplation of it invited pity.

On the steps of his own house, when he had found it empty and sealed against him, Ovide had felt that something was wrong. Now, after a period of buoyant relief, and in front of Ferdinand’s house, here he was again falling back into his first state of suspense. Something was surely wrong, but in the simplicity of his honest, large-hearted nature, try as he might, Ovide could not fathom it. Ah! his children! He had not seen them all yet, and perhaps one of them was—

“Emélie,” he unsteadily asked, “I only see Hector—where are the—”

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“—Look in the doorway, Ovide,” a voice eagerly shouted.

Ovide's glance darted there. Ferdinand's bulk filled the entrance, and past him, wherever possible, even between his legs and over a shoulder, seven heads were thrust; the youngest, a tot of a girl, blocked into climbing a chair for a peep over Ferdinand, with her face against his—incomparable contrast—and a pair of securing arms about his neck.

“God be thanked!” ejaculated Ovide. “My wife is safe, my children well, and I am back unharmed.”

Then he stopped, a shadow fell upon his soul, his expression changed; another shadow flitted over the mind, then another, and another, and finally a host of them—all caused by the sight of wee Marie's white arms clasping the sunbrowned neck of Ferdinand.

“Your new father is well scorched, isn't he?” remarked Edmond. “He's much blacker than your other father.”

“They must have hatched him in an oven,” Hector reflected, “like the way Alphonse says they do chickens in the city.”

“Why doesn't your father Ferdinand let your brothers and sisters pass?” inquired Edmond. “Is he drunk? or what is the matter with him?”

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"Maybe; I don't know," shrugged Hector. "If he is, the others know it, and they're waiting for him to fall. Then they'll be out fast enough. My other father, though, looks as if he was going to strike him."

"*Batême!* don't he? Then there'll be a row! But why should he? your father Ferdinand didn't hit him."

Hector, three years the senior of his playmate and schoolfellow Edmond, invested in a sage look.

"Well, it's this way," he replied; "my father, come back, has been with the English while he was away, and they are great for what you call fair play. And the last time Father Viau was at our house, I heard him tell my mother and other father that—that—*sacré!* I can never get the name of that place my first father went to—that the English went there to give some people a box on the ear for not acting fair. And so the first thing my father Ovide does when he comes home is to stop my mother from being unfair to me; and I think that if my other father doesn't let my brothers and sisters out soon, my father Ovide will give him a box on the ear, too. See!"

"Ferdinand," said Ovide, hoarsely, "why is my wife on her knees parroting 'Forgive! forgive!' as if she knew nothing else? and why does my daughter fondle you with the manner of your child, and not mine?"

## HOMECOMING OF OVIDE BOUCHETTE.

Ferdinand raised his arms in utter despair. He moved—and jumbled the children. Then he stepped out from the door altogether. Little Marie lost her hold, and wailed on the doorsill ; while the rest, as released, tumbled out after Ferdinand for a free gawking and thumb-sucking stare at the incomprehensible.

“Answer me !” and Ovide’s whole manner was that of a man about to deal an awful blow.

Ferdinand again lifted his hands—the paper going up and down with them—unable to do his feelings justice in words. In his gaze burnt all manner of lights ; the truth that staggers, hopelessness, contrition, and implored mercy among them. His disorder of mind was great and evident, and tied speech. Then the paper, a second time uplifted, came into view, and, as trifles sometimes do on such occasions, beckoned to the eye. Instantly, from out of a cloud of thoughts, one sent the thumb and forefinger of Ferdinand’s shaking left hand into his vest pocket for a match. This he now drew out and lit.

“Ovide Bouchette,” he, as well as he could, found voice to say, “could I as easily consume my sin against you as I do this paper,” tossing the flaming newspaper from him, “I would count it as the most solemn happiness of my life. But as truly as I must answer for myself in the last day, we all thought that you were dead.”

## HOMECOMING OF OVIDE BOUCHETTE.

The destroying wrath died out of Ovide's face—Ferdinand's words showed up the mystery in which he had moved from Pascal's house to this. He had returned to find himself regarded as a dead man, his wife married again, and his children under a step-father's roof. This, then, was his homecoming. At the thought of it, all the energy died out of his mind and body. He looked and felt and acted like an old man. He marked his wife in extreme distress ; and Ferdinand stood before him, changed for the worse in a twinkling. His neighbors covered the sidewalk and street, unquestionably grouped in silent sympathy, or whispering together with bent glances.

The road was white with dust, and lined with green and yellow and crimson-spotted trees. At intervals a house peeped out of the gorgeous foliage, lively with paint or dull with buffeting of weather. Close by, above the fall leaves, glittered the convent cross ; and in the far distance gleamed the spire of the next village. Beyond all, finally, and diminished by distance, the winding river streaked at the base of a low range of mountains.

Ovide may have seen these things, and he may not. But he was conscious of the one sapping, thumping idea that dead men—dead by false report—should sometimes remain dead. And as if compelled by such a conviction, he, blurred of eye, and with the sound of falling waters in his ears—

## HOMECOMING OF OVIDE BOUCHETTE

although none were near—uncertainly started off. But, realizing something of his purpose, his neighbors called to and closed in upon him, as if to hinder and prevent him. Then Ovide woke up, as it were, and savagely put himself out of their reach; tearing loose from Pascal's grip as if it had been a woman's.

“Why did your father Ferdinand burn the paper?” asked Edmond.

Hector waited until the last of the black fragments touched the earth. Then he replied, “I suppose my first father wants to live with us again, and my second father won't have him. So he thinks to scare him away with a match and some paper.”

“Yes, yes; you're right!” exclaimed Edmond. “See! he surely is frightened. He is about to go —”

“— Back to—to—*sacré!* that name is more than too much for me!—back to that hot country again,” Hector interruptingly added. “He can do nothing alone—the crowd won't let him pass even. *Bon!* he has broken through—Pascal is no good. Now wait till my father Ovide returns, two months—three months—next spring, perhaps—with some of the soldiers to help him that he helped. Then he will go in by the front door, and kick my father Ferdinand so hard out of the back door that he

## HOMECOMING OF OVIDE BOUCHETTE.

will hit the shed. You'll see! I like my father Ferdinand, but my other father is also a nice man; and after coming so far to see us, it is not right to tell him to go so soon."

Then, acting on a sudden impulse, Hector ran towards his father.

"*Pére! pére!*" he cried; "when are you coming back for good?"

Ovide snatched the boy up and strained him to his breast. Then with a last kiss he put him down, and in an unrecognizable voice said: "That is not for me to know. But whether I come again or not, Hector, be a Bouchette. Now go; and whenever you kneel, pray for me."

Unable to trust his voice any further, Ovide now turned his son and heir towards those he waved back, and with hasty steps he was soon out of the village and lost to sight.

. . . . .  
In the depth of that winter, at a lumbering camp on the Mattawa, an axe was put to a tree, and it fell. When, by dint of great exertion, they recovered Ovide from beneath it, the crushed body had parted with its soul.

And that was how Ovide Bouchette, feet first in a baggage car, came home for good.

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

### I.

FELIX DUMOUCHEL had been to the neighbouring town ; and having left home at five in the morning, humming a gay air, he now returned at a suspiciously late hour, boisterously trolling "*En roulant ma boule, en roulant.*"

From the dusty main road that brought him back to St. Agapit again, he at this point—still singing—turned along a short cross street to a third, that paralleled the first, and down which he began to resolutely, if unsteadily, proceed. Running for the most part between fields, the close-cropped sod of the road he now traversed was cut into by nothing but cow-paths and a worn pair of wheel-ruts, with the track of hoofs between them, and very simply adorned with knee-high patches of weeds, that were here and there overtopped by a mullein-stalk.

Alone on the left stood the house of the Dumouchels ; and it was towards this that Felix, thirty, good-looking and muscular, now bent his uneven steps by the light of a waning moon.

Within thirty yards of his homestead he kicked

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

something with a foot, that rolled away for a short distance and then stopped. It was white, and stooping—a piece of temerity that nearly lost him his balance—Felix picked it up. An onion—bah! He was about to throw it away, but it remained in his hand. Then, as if about to eat it, he began brushing off the damp adhering earth.

A few feet farther on, and only by a great effort he saved himself from falling—his foot had slipped into a freshly-made wheel-rut.

Felix paused. *Whiskey blanc* is not the best thing in the world for the brain, but he now went into thought. The small stream that crossed the road in front of him was bridged, lengthwise, by a couple of logs, and the soil on either side of it was bare, brown and soft.

Felix stopped singing, looked round about him, then at the onion, and finally down at his feet ; his air, meanwhile, being that of a man who, deep in his cups, feels confronted with a matter demanding investigation. At last he had the thought he wanted. “ Nobody is drawing onions yet,” he now and triumphantly soliloquized, “ and how comes this one ? ” Then, knitting his brow, he poked the toe of his boot in an unfamiliar rut, and cogitated with a mixed mind.

A minute later he was on the move again, leaving the road, two arpents beyond his father’s house, to leap the ditch and look over the rail fence.



W.B.

"Felix . . . now went into thought — p. 34.



## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

"Ours are the first pulled," he muttered ; "and as for the old man carting them away before their time, I would as soon expect to see a tree walk. And for what those mischief-making women at home might do behind my back, to afterwards poke a finger at me—ah, *tor Dieu !*"

Sobered in a great measure by the sight, Felix was quickly over the fence. Could he have laid hands at this moment on the person responsible for his rage, it would have gone hard with him. But all he could do was to impotently storm and swear and shake his fist as he called on the Holy Virgin to witness this wrong-doing.

Where, two days ago, he had completed the best part of a two weeks' pulling of his onion crop—prior to its removal to the barns, and thence to the root-house—a gap in its white quantity nearest the gate was at once apparent, even beneath a partly-clouded moon, and, as the owner could easily perceive, enough had been taken to form a respectable cart-load.

Felix pocketed his hands in silent wrath, and when he withdrew them again a short clay pipe was in one and some loose, coarse native tobacco in the other. Then when ready for it he mechanically searched through several pockets before finding a match, and scratching this on the bowl of his pipe he lit the latter and made his way to the gate. This, as usual, he found hooked, and passing out he shut it again and looked back.

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

The tell-tale marks of trespassing wheel and shod hoof were plainly visible in the fitful moonlight, and in turning away a white object at his feet beside a post claimed his attention. He stooped and picked it up—another onion! Flinging it back to its fellows, he spent the next three minutes leaning against the gate, smoking in the manner of one hard in thought. Then he roused himself, shook the top ashes from his pipe, and began retracing his steps up the road.

### II.

THE end of a half-mile brought him back to the cross-street again ; but instead of turning along this, as formerly, he continued straight on past it, slowly and savagely, with the air of a man who meant to verify some unpleasant suspicion.

The three detached houses he now neared, on his left, faced open fields ; and next, leaving the middle of the road for the side of it, he approached the first of these beneath a row of soft maples, avoiding the gravelly walk to brush past their trunks on the more noiseless turf.

Over a low shabby picket fence, finally—at the farthest convenient spot from the house—Felix placed one leg and then the other. Then, stealthily fringing by the three short rows of celery, he passed on between a few black-currant bushes and beneath several *Fameuse* apple-trees, till, clear of all, he had

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

reached a dilapidated straw-thatched shed. The fresh tracks of a pair of wheels were now discerned running into this, and it did not add to the visitor's composure to find the door padlocked.

Emptying the half-consumed contents of his pipe on the ground, he trod the same underground with a twist of his boot, as he thrust the pipe back into a pocket and looked around for something with which to force out one of the staples.

Ah, but, Mother of God ! he used half a dozen such locks of his own every day at home. His keys ! had he his keys with him ? He searched feverishly in his pockets. *Bon Dieu !* here they were, and with a hand as damp as his forehead he brought them forth.

One—two—three—*diable !* would none fit ? He tried the fourth, and with an inspiring click the lock and lock-arm hinged apart. Exulting as he did so, Felix had the door open in a trice, and there was no misdoubting the odor that now greeted his nostrils.

Again searching through his pockets for a match, Felix next felt for one in the band of his hat—where he so often carried them when working coatless in the fields ; but as the last had been used on his pipe, he found himself at the mercy of the shed's darkness.

But he knew the place, did Felix ; the woodpile was on the left, and—*sacré !*—here he nearly fell over a block from it.

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

Edging forward more gingerly thence over the crackling chips, he finally knocked up against the shaft of a cart.

A stride brought him to the wheel ; and reaching over, his hand came into contact with sacking. Now removing this, and peering over as well, a glance and sweeping feel of his hand next—aside from the sense of smell—indicated a load of onions—of *ognons blanc*.

Enough ! The sacking was replaced as found, and in making his way back to the door again, Felix bumped into the saw-horse, and sat down on it to think.

Ah, it was painful ! painful ! thought he. That dog of a Placide, robbing his only sister's sweetheart ! He would not work, the idle, shiftless cur, but he would steal—and this was stealing brought home to the heart with a vengeance.

A score of times had he already interposed to save Albina from the shame of Placide's disgrace, and taken money from his own pocket to do it. And this !—his face grew wet to think of it. Something must be done ; it should not be passed over ; and between love and duty there was war in his soul that night. The exposure would drive Albina from him, humiliated and hidden. Were he now within arm's reach of that vile brother of hers, he would half throttle him for the hound that he was. Ah, *misère* ! where would it all end ?

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

Felix wiped his brow with a silk handkerchief, and arose. By the door he had left ajar and the various crevices about him he could see that the light of the less beclouded moon outside was stronger. He would go home—there was nothing more to be done now, and perhaps—who knows!—a dream would solve the difficulty. If the Curé sometimes received inspiration while asleep, why not he? But then the father was a holy man, and the Blessed God might not speak to Children of the Church as He would to a priest. He would go home, however, and brood over the matter on the morrow, and possibly by that time the Evil One would have whispered a course to him, the adoption of which, by crossing himself, he might turn to good account.

In this mood and brew of thought, therefore, Felix now passed out from the oniony gloom into the radiance of a moonlit night, and turned to relock the door.

But before he could do so, a sound behind caused him to glance over his shoulder for a sight that gave him a shock, insomuch that he had to wrench his hands free from their unfinished work—as if they had been frozen to it—before he could face about.

### III.

*“Mon Dieu!”* said Albina Sabourin, coming closer, “is it you, Felix? I thought it was Placide;

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

he is not home yet. I have been sitting up with father, who is at last asleep, and the outside air is so sweet to one from the sick-room! Poor father, how he suffers! And he was ever the same to me—kind, thoughtful and gentle. Ah, *bon Dieu!* what would I not give to share some of his pain—some of that anguish which only his eyes betray! I fear”—but at this point Albina left off for an eye-poking use of her apron. When she resumed again it was with more self-control, and in a different strain. “But you,” she continued; “tell me, what are you doing here—alone—at this hour?”

A sudden parching ran up and down the other’s throat, so that he could scarcely speak, and when at last he did, after wetting his lips, it was in a voice that lacked depth.

“Truly, I was looking for the hames Placide borrowed of me. He forgot to return them, and to-morrow is market-day.”

Albina was another woman in an instant.

“Felix” (how the one word stirred him!), “it is not the truth!”

Coming forward, she gently grasped each lapel of his coat and looked straight up at him, her face close to his. Felix compressed his lips and teeth together, and did with as little breathing as possible.

“I have every trick of your voice by heart,” Albina continued, “and this ring of it now is new.

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

Why should you look for harness in a woodshed? You are hiding something from me. Fie, my Felix, as if you could not trust me! But I will see for myself."

As Felix folded his arms an idea was born of the moment to him that backed him up against the door, barring entrance.

"Listen, heart of my heart," said he. "As God is my witness, I have done no wrong, but my honor is at stake to-night. Do as I bid you, and Monsieur le Curé will have his fee within a month. Bring me the stable-key from the kitchen, and a few matches. Then retire to the house again, and pray the Mother of Jesus for my success. Quick, *cherie*, quick! and when back in the house again do not look out of it, and all may go well."

Albina's face expressed much in sensation, but rapidly recovering herself, she turned and ran towards the house. A few moments at the most sufficed for her to do as Felix desired, and placing the key and matches with a trembling hand in his, she looked up love at him. But Felix, sensible of his freighted breath, deigned her no more than a shake of the head as, with a set face and short strides, he walked off to the stable; while Albina, unrequited in her desire, and prey to a thousand fears, stood looking after him with filling eyes and clasped hands. Then, recollecting herself, she faithfully hastened back to the house again, and disappeared into it. 41

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

### IV.

UNLOCKING the door, Felix entered the stable, found the lantern, lit it, and by its sickly yellowing harnessed the horse. As busy as his hands were with straps and buckles, so was his brain with thought ; the one working the other in him with a will.

If that rascally Placide, thought he, as he buckled the throat-latch and led the horse out, was only in bed and asleep—it was a few minutes to one—the scheme was as good as accomplished. But, as things were, there was no knowing when he might turn up, and that, too, perhaps, in a condition that strikes first and argues afterwards.

But Felix doggedly took the chances of extreme risk ; and, seven minutes from the time the lantern was lit, it was out again, the stable-door locked, the key pocketed, and the horse between shafts in the woodshed.

The trying time of all was now to come, but Felix, never hesitating, walked the horse with its load out into the yard. Then, closing and locking the woodshed door—detaching the key that fitted it from its ring, and placing the same in a separate pocket—he deliberately led the horse close by the house, and out of the front gate to the road. Here, after closing the gate, Felix seated himself on the rear end of the right shaft, and quietly drove off.

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

It was astonishing with what dispatch and comparatively low result in sound all this had been done ; and once upon the sandy, grassy road, even the clacking the wheels made was in a degree muffled.

Arrived at the field, Felix dumped the onions out, and then, with the shovel his forethought had provided, he set to work and filled the cart with earth, equal in measure to that of the emptied onions, and taken from the spot in which they had grown—the loam including many an onion, and, in skin and stalk, much oniony refuse. On finishing, he spread the same sacking that had covered the onions over the changed load ; and an hour after leaving the Sabourin's Felix was back there again, intensely satisfied to find everything as he had left it.

Without any loss of time, when seconds were so valuable, he opened, passed in through and shut the gate, turned and backed the horse and its load into the woodshed, hoping as he did so that Placide would either fail to notice the additional marks of the wheels, or else consider them only in an ordinary light ; unhitched and led out the horse ; locked the woodshed door for the last time, and made sure that he put the key in his pocket ; stalled the horse in the stable, unharnessed it, threw the harness into the adjoining manger where and just as Placide had ; locked the stable-door in its turn

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

for the last time ; crossed the yard, and, having found the kitchen-door unbolted—whether Albina had left it unfastened to him or Placide he was unable to say—tip-toed in and hung the stable-key on its accustomed nail over the sink.

Then softly shutting both the kitchen and porch doors behind him, he made his way down and through the garden, over the fence, and home.

Ding-a-ling ! Ding-a-ling ! Ding-a-ling !

It was the bell of a rapidly driven priest, on his way to the dangerously ill or dying, usually rung by the reverend gentleman's driver as he drove ; the former busy with his missal, and at whose passing those by the wayside were expected to kneel and offer up prayer for the afflicted.

Placide Sabourin, on his way to the city market, stopped his meaningless whip-cracking and brought his horse to a standstill. At the other's approach he crossed himself, and began repeating the *Qui Tollis*.

With the two vehicles abreast, that of the priest also stopped, and for the first time Placide perceived that the holy father drove and rang for himself.

Then a great fear seized upon the superstitious Placide when he next saw the priest drop bell, book and reins, and lift his hands towards Heaven in his own direction ; and as he looked, and no sound yet came, he began to quake and tremble so that

## THE ONION IN THE WHEEL-RUT.

his knees smote together, and to shrink back upon his seat as if from heat. At last the man of God spoke—words so solemn, slow and awful that Placide felt as if riven with fire :

“ Thou—guilty—man ! Accursed—be—thy—load ! May—it—turn—to—the—earth—from—which—it—was—taken ! ”

Placide doubted his senses, but he turned and lifted the sacking. At once, and with a yell, he sprang down from the cart, plunged headlong through the roadside bushes, and having fallen rather than climbed over the fence, made fearfully for the nearest woods.

And from that hour Placide Sabourin was a changed man.

As for Albina, she kept her own counsel, drew her own conclusions, and made a good wife to a man who became troubled of mind at times, to think that he had once made light of holy office and played the priest.

## “MADAME.”

### I.

THERE are two ways of seeing the old St. Ovrine Market. One is to pass it at night-time, when the folds of silence overlap its desertedness. Then it becomes the enchanted haunt of ghostly light and shadow, in noiseless quest among the benches and closed stalls that look in a long row from one street to another, and which compose the lower half of the outer walls of that red-bricked and gabled time-server of three square cupolas—*Le Marché Public St. Ovrine.*

The other is to come upon it on market-days, when country carts, with the horses out and shafts up, back it, wheel to wheel, from one end to the other, in a line even with the edge of the sidewalk and the hanging eaves of a low wooden roof. Here the increase of the earth is brought and displayed, most happily disposed in the effect contributed by it towards a picture of *habitant* husbandry past all duplicating outside of the Province. For, of all the good things grown in the greatness of Her Majesty’s vast empire, the horn of plenty is here emptied of some matchless fruits ; and whether it

## “MADAME.”

be the first tempting bunches of spring *echalotes* or rhubarb, the cabbages and musk-melons of waning summer, or the peach and Fameuse apples of early and late fall, the result is the same—they are the best the world can produce, and this, Quebec's sentinel island in the valley of the St. Lawrence, their home.

Across the way from the market lie the shunting tracks of the great Station, where “locals” are made up. On the south-east corner of the market—past which runs the city's deadliest level crossing—“Madame” had her place of business. The only cellar on that side of the market, this was descended into by a short, steep flight of steps. Twenty-eight years is a lifetime to some, but to “Madame” they merely represented the length of her habitation of this basement, from dawn to dark, on market-days. Inside, one stooped to avoid the log-hewn rafters. The place bore a dingy aspect, and was of a peeling, mottled appearance, from an ancient coat of whitewash. The few baskets and barrels that posed diffidently near the door contained roots and potatoes. At the top of the steps outside, samples from these were shown, together with fruits and the finer grades of vegetables. Back of the basement again, affording a view of passing feet, a deal table draped with a black and light-patterned oilcloth, three chairs, a wooden footstool, a small plain cupboard, and a still smaller stove—near which two latter

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sometimes sprawled a three-colored cat—completed the more noticeable furnishings of an apartment—some would call it a hole—occupied three days out of every working six. Here “Madame” had her meals on market-days, instead of at home on the Rue Euphine, over and beyond the railway tracks ; and here Mr. Beaudoin, the fat and ruddy-faced butcher, who chopped and sawed and cut and weighed all day long in his stall overhead, also dined, sending down something choice in meat for the purpose.

The wrinkles on “Madame’s” face may have been many, but they could not cross out simple faith. Neither could she command more than crippled English ; but if the tongue halted, her hands or feet did not, seeming, in fact, tireless.

“Madame” was short and stout, and the strings of her faded black bonnet ever reached in a dangle to her dark print dress. As broad and long as the market was, yet throughout the length and breadth of it “Madame,” as “Madame,” was as well known as the crumbling, rambling old pile itself.

Her virtues were several, chiefest among them being to do as she would be done by, and to drag out a dull existence upheld by the belief that life in this world was but jangling chords to the harmony of the next. This may sound hackneyed to some ears, but to battle for the bare necessities of life, and to rise the year round at daybreak to

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do it, may well furrow, brown-harden and mar a face, and try a human heart. In measures she heaped ; and if “Madame” counted wrong in the corn, she erred for the buyer.

Such was Madame Desormeau in the thirtieth year of her widowhood, the twenty-eighth of her sojourn at the market, and the sixty-sixth of her life.

A change was now at hand.

## II.

THROUGH the storms and sunshine, the snows and summers of many, many years, “Madame” labored early and late, owing no one, troubling few and resigned to that lot in life in which it had pleased God to place her.

Every *sou* of small profit was the wage of fair dealing, and when it went forth to buy, gave good account of itself. “Madame” never haggled, but she was thrifty ; and whether for garden truck, or a purchase in the little fly-specked corner grocery, she knew the price and was not to be done out of it.

Care and the creeping of age who can withstand? Not “Madame,” surely, who was but mortal.

One pelting wet and steamy morning in late August, “Madame’s” place of business, like a bank, failed to open. A few days later she reappeared —but it was not the same person; hardship had

## “MADAME.”

commenced to tell at last, and, at a stroke, put “Madame” in the first of a feeble stage. Beaudoin, the butcher, was a short-spoken, unsmiling man, but his heart, in a rough way, being one of the kindest, he came down out of his shop to greet “Madame,” and ask after her health. So did some of the neighbors; to one and all of whom “Madame” made the same answer in French that she once pathetically did in her difficult English.

“I was weary, and asked God to take me; but He” (shaking her head) “says that it is not time—that I am not to go yet.”

There was an unexpected and thrilling nobility in the way these words were uttered; and to look into the speaker’s face, seamed and scarred with the evidences of this world’s conflict, was, above all things, to see—well traced in a leathery skin—the creased and crowfooted badge of a Great Nature.

As if to scorn, dismiss and forget the idea of her ailing, “Madame” once more hustled about with a show of former energy. But it could not and did not last. Before the end of September the front of the store had been relinquished for the back; and where of yore she had spent the best part of her time outside in the interests of her business, “Madame” now sat within her cellar in a rocking-chair, befoggedly awaiting the patronage of unsolicited custom.

The inevitable result soon set in—“Madame’s”

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stock and buyers both began to dwindle ; the penalty of being less and less particular in what she bought and how she arranged it for sale, people passing her by, in consequence, for those—her next door neighbor as often as not—who met their needs in a more attractive pandering to tastes. Then the time came, all in a few weeks, when “Madame” and the cat and Neglect kept watch together within a place of rubbishy look, in front of which High Carelessness warned trade away from a few baskets of old potatoes, carrots, beets, turnips and onions, some lean and wilted bunches of celery, two rusty, stunted heads of cauliflower, and a pale bruised, misshapen pumpkin—a contrast, truly, to the apples and oranges, the sickle pears, the limited but select assortment of citrons, squashes and pumpkins, the pickling cucumbers, the five-cent whisks of sage and summer-savory, the tidy row of bushel baskets filled with fresh, clean vegetables, the white, crisp, green-topped celery, and the corner pile of solid new cabbages ; to all of which it must not be forgotten to add the leeks and brussel-sprouts that “Madame” had kept in season.

But these were the days when “Madame” was strong and well, and took a keen pride in her business ; painstaking not only in what she offered, but in how she offered it—an art that largely affected surrounding competition. Now she had begun to fail in mind and body, and to remember the

## “MADAME.”

past better than to know the present. This some of her neighbors saw with pity, some with a shrug of indifference, and some with ill-concealed satisfaction. But “Madame,” no more observing, rocked away all unconscious that such sentiments existed about her; sitting in solitary state in her *chaise berceuse*, or, with odd flashes of understanding, getting up out of this to potter about in the interests of her business. More reminiscent than real, however, were these occasional efforts she made to put an inviting look on things. To other eyes it had been apparent for some time that the place had been gradually drifting into a state of dispiritedness, as if, out of mute, lubberly solicitude for its mistress, it took no thought of itself to see the human mechanism running down that so long had kept it going.

One might pass it over in silence and pain, perhaps, but it could not be denied that the pumpkin was spotting mouldy; that the celery had been long enough on hand to turn brown and flabby and tough-looking; that the interior of “Madame’s” place had taken on a dismal cast; that the musty, nigh-empty barrels in a hang-dog gather at the bottom of the steps had lost one of their number to the hatchet for firewood; that, much as it was warm outside, “Madame” felt cold, and of an infirmity beginning in the joints, so that she could not bend or stoop or grasp a thing without having to conquer

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a most unaccountable stiffness ; and, finally, that a fire was never lit in the diminutive, pot-bellied stove except at meal-times. Winter came on apace, and if she kept a fire going now when it was not even chilly—albeit she felt so herself—what would she do when the cold weather did come, and, for the first time in thirty years, no money with which to buy fuel ? So, perforce, she must keep her boxes and barrels for the days when they would most be needed, and fare through the coming winter with as little fire as possible—just sufficient to cook the meals by, especially Monsieur Beaudoin’s dinner—that she might have enough to buy food with, enough to pay the rent of both house and market—a score would jump at the chance of her corner—and enough towards a fund wherewith to assure the saying of masses for her when she was gone.

It had never occurred to “Madame” that she was growing old. Not once had vigor deserted her until that day, two months ago, when she had awakened to a wet morning and the realization—in a twinkling, as it were—that her powers were giving out. And there she had lain ; feverish a little, shivering a little, with no desire to get up, none to eat, and of a drowsy lightheadedness through which she listened to the pouring of the rain without.

Since then she—according to “Madame” herself

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—had all but fully recovered. None the less, however, was the knock of advancing age heard, and whom she prepared to admit by resolving to lay by a little each month to pay for the repose of her soul and that of its body.

That she was not to go just yet “Madame” felt certain. When the spring came, therefore, it would renew her in health ; till then she must get along as best she could, trusting in Him to whom she took all her troubles. And that these trembling fits, these quavering visits to her voice, this sense of coldness she could not shake off, and the sometime cloudings of her mind, would all pass away, “Madame” had not the least doubt.

Nor was she mistaken.

## III.

IN October summer came back, and the glories of it and of fall were united. By day it was a great white burst of sunshine ; at night a cool touch crept in, and reddened the leaves in warning of winter.

“Madame” arose as usual in the early grey dawn of market-mornings, dressed with difficulty and some unsteadiness, and left the house with cold hands and feet for the cellar on the corner of *Le Marché Public St. Ovrine*. Here she remained until the shades of evening put an end

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to business, and released her to a weak walk homewards, a little richer in gain—partly from charitable purchases, if the truth were told—but of an infinitesimal value compared with the profits of past transactions.

The gossip and jargon of old went on around her during these last pleasant days of the year, but it more than had no meaning now to “Madame”—she, still hearing well, was deaf to it. Instead, her thoughts reverted to and dwelt on the time when she and Phileas were first married, and started keeping house on a short cul-de-sac that was more a lane than a street; and the birds never sang sweeter, the days never seemed brighter, and their humble home and vicinity never took on more of a yearning grandeur, than in that bygone period. In due time heaven sent them children that grew up and went to school—three boys and pretty Amélie, the picture of herself. Their traits and tricks and prattle she remembered as well as if it were only yesterday. But this was all she had to treasure them by, for the smallpox took them off, two by two, and of their belongings all were burnt. Thus brought face to face with the awful blank a hearth desolated in this manner creates, Phileas—less a man than his wife was a woman—set up his standard drink high, and fatally followed it; for they brought him home one night the worse of liquor and an accident. He had been run over on

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the railroad opposite the market, two minutes after leaving it. Thenceforth “Madame” aged fast in look, replacing her late husband at the market with a kind heart, the kinder for woe.

### IV.

WITH November came gloom, snatches of fog, windstorms, and bashful falls of snow, whose meek deposit rain, or a succeeding mildness, soon dispatched. Withal, it is a fireside month ; but, for the nonce, it was not so to “Madame.”

You could see your breath in the cellar on the corner. The *habitants* outside, in their thick grey home-spun, watching or waiting for chance or regular customers, stamped about or thwacked their arms for comfort’s sake. “Madame” within, muffled from head to heel, sat and rocked and coughed, with a wheezy indrawing of her breath at times that reminded of a pair of damaged bellows ; whilst the cat curled up for warmth between the cold stove and the cupboard.

December, that month of spending and merry-making, was born without a flake, and died bequeathing nothing but dust and a zero-snap to January. Meanwhile “Madame,” with tightening chest, had spent an apathetic Christmas, and the barrels huddled by the door now lamented three of their number in ashes from the stove.

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On the seventeenth day of that month (January), at twenty minutes past twelve by the butcher's clock, the latter left his shop for “Madame's” below, all hungry for the blood-sausages he had sent down to be cooked.

An appetizing odor of meat sizzling over the dying embers of a wood-fire greeted him as he entered, and the place was thinly blue with the smoke of the frying. Closely drawn up to the front of the stove, with her back to the door, sat “Madame,” her head forward as if asleep. From clasping the familiar iron-grey shawl about her, both hands had fallen to lie in her lap; while by her feet, which rested on the bottom of the stove, the cat had uncurled its full length to the comparatively delicious heat.

On his own scales that morning Mr. Beaudoin had tipped the beam at three pounds over two hundred. But he forgot his bulk, and made amends for a noisy entrance, by changing from a heavy tread to one soft only by contrast—the boards bending and creaking beneath him—as he made his way over to where “Madame” nodded by the fire.

Médard Beaudoin did not mind the cold—he was used to it. Year in and year out, his fireless stall above knew no warmth save that which summer brought. Nevertheless he did enjoy and look forward to the few minutes he snatched at noon-

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time, when, leaving the shop in charge of his youthful, pock-marked assistant, he, with hearty relish, partook of the meal “ Madame ” had prepared for him. Nor was it so much what he ate and drank (bread and butter and meat and strong tea), as the comfort he enjoyed—so it appeared to him—in “ Madame’s ” basement.

At his jarring approach now, the awakened cat lazily rolled over, yawned, stretched, and then sat up, only to settle down again—after blinking in a friendly sleepy way at him—for more dozing.

The warping table with its worn oilcloth was seen ready-laid for him, with the usual black bone-handled knife and fork, the stoneware cup and saucer, the chipped milk-jug, the handleless sugar-bowl, the tin salt and pepper castors, a small dish of butter, and an uncut loaf next the wall, with a large knife beside it. Between the stovepipe and frying-pan, and leaning against the former—there being no other room on the stove for it—a plate warmed for the meat.

“ ‘ Madame,’ ” said the new-comer, kindly, subduing his great voice for her sake as he stooped and touched her on the shoulder—“ ‘ Madame,’ your fire is low and needs coal. Is the meat done yet ? ”

But “ Madame ” remained motionless.

“ *Mon Dieu !* ” exclaimed the speaker, “ she is sound asleep,” and forthwith he started to replenish





"Instinctively he lifted a hand" - p. 39.

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the fire. But neither stick nor chip of wood, nor even a lump of coal the size of a walnut, could he find. Upon which, coming back to “Madame” again, he gently shook her by the arm.

“‘Madame!’—Madame Desormeau—awake you! The fire wants for fuel—where is it?”

But as “Madame” yet neither answered nor looked up, the butcher bent down—his hands to his knees—and closely scrutinized her face. The eyes, he found, were but half shut. Instinctively he lifted a hand. The feel of it told its own tale, and at once dropping it he ran out. When he returned, half the market was at his heels; while by ones and twos and threes, as the news spread, others fast followed, and kept adding to the crowd in the cellar on the corner of *Le Marché Public St. Ovrine*.

Aloof from all sorrowed Beaujardin the butcher. But how was he to know that “Madame” had wanted?

For that her tremblings, these quavering visits to her voice, this sense of coldness she could not shake off, and occasional cloudings of the mind, would in time all pass away, “Madame” doubted not.

Nor was she mistaken.

## THE LAST LADY OF BEAULAC.

### I.

HAVING climbed the stairs of anticipation, the village of Aubry now clasped to its heart the event itself. In short, Zephirine, the dark, coquettish beauty of the place, had consented to resign her belleship, and to reign over one heart instead of the several she had heretofore—and this was the day of the wedding.

Marriage is the most marvellous rite on earth. All ceremonies are mere symbols and outward show, depending upon human integrity. Failing this, obedience is commanded by a process termed Law, which is nothing but the Charter of All Human, subscribed to at every birth. When a man marries, therefore, he pledges himself before a cloud of witnesses. Should his word prove brittle, and break, he may still cement it with conscience. But sometimes the supply of the latter runs short, and then the World sighs—and does its duty.

It is not usual for a man to repent the moment the knot is tied. This either happens in time to save him his wedding fees, or decently late enough afterwards to enable him turn actor and deceive everyone but his wife.

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Zephirine had her faults, but the greatest of these fell far short of justifying Isidore Labréche in the course he took to correct his bride of an hour.

The dawn of a wedding-day commonly produces a chaos in feelings and affairs. In Aubry, all except the blacksmith suspended business to do honor to Zephirine, who—besides being pretty, heiress to an hundred-arpent farm, and, prospectively, the richest girl thereabouts—had won her way into the general affection with a manner in complete contrast to that by which she strung men's hearts as others do beads. For Zephirine could love her father as a sole child and daughter should—Madame Duquette being dead ; act with model unaffectedness toward her neighbors ; and then veer round like a weather-vane and treat the men—most of them—with all the caprices of a second Cleopatra. In their presence she was said to have a mood for every minute ; and, as a climax, of all her swains she accepted Isidore—a passionate man when provoked, and because of which, and the way he kept to himself, together with other indications, regarded in general as but a shave this side of insanity.

When Aubry awakened to the fact of the engagement, a good many eyebrows were lifted—his cousin Dubuc having been deemed the favorite—and numberless shrugs were exchanged ; but, like the dead, no one said a word against Isidore—it

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was not the custom. Sooner or later he sniffed an unfavorable opinion to its source—and the result was not always agreeable.

From double and contending motives, therefore, the village prepared to start the couple upon their matrimonial journey with enthusiasm—they owed it to Zephirine, and Isidore might treasure it up against those that held back.

Yet, on the whole, Isidore was a man you might know with satisfaction. He seldom swore, got drunk, or lost beyond a fixed limit in cards, and besides the fair average he made at mass, he successfully worked his father's farm at half profits.

The weakest spot in his character assuredly was that he sometimes forgot himself in a fit of sudden anger, as completely as a man sometimes forgets a name. A celebrated case, to illustrate, was that of his cousin, young Dubuc. Isidore was sickling corn for his cattle one evening, when Dubuc drove up. In the light of the sun, then setting at the end of the road, the sparkle of a cleaned buggy was added to by the shine of a grey colt in Sunday harness, and Dubuc attired in his best. As cousins and rivals, Dubuc was, by long odds, the more popular.

“How is the old man?” he now drew rein to inquire; Labréche, *père*, being a rheumatic cripple, and a brass-throated evil spirit in trying weather.

“As I left him,” replied Isidore, who, after a look around, went on with his slashing again.

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His manner was plainly the signal for Dubuc to be moving—a glance told him where the other was going ; but the new-comer chose to ignore the hint.

“Then how is the young man ?” Dubuc next, and not ill-naturedly, asked, meaning, of course, Isidore himself.

“In no mood to answer questions,” and the latter tossed an armful of corn on the cut pile.

“*Pardon !*” the first blandly corrected ; “that is only half the truth. You should have said, ‘Seldom in a mood to answer any questions put by one Dubuc Labréche.’ Bah !”—with a shrug, taking up the slack of the reins to go—“you are devil and stone both ; I can make no impression. I offer you friendship for the sake of your family and mine, and because of what we are to one another in blood. But you have refused it before ; you will not have it now ; and I am both sorry and will try no further. A last word, Isidore Labréche : Zephirine is mine—no one else’s !” and, saying which, he started.

Isidore straightened like whalebone, and for a moment stood knee-deep in rage as well as corn, with the ring of Dubuc’s boast in his ears. Then he raised his hand with the sickle—and threw.

As Isidore afterwards paid all expenses, and Dubuc would make no statement, the Crown, with none to witness, was unable to go on with the case, and dropped it. The main facts leaked out,

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however, in the way they mysteriously do at times, and played no small part in recommending Isidore to Zephirine as her final choice. A man, she argued, that acted on her behalf with such force and promptness was the kind of a man for a husband ; and for which reason, as much as any other, she preferred the heavy build and temperament of Isidore to the relatively better looks and qualities of his cousin Dubuc—and seven more like him.

Which now refers us to the wedding itself.

### II.

THE wedding morn, that eleventh day of October, broke without a cloud, and matured with a mellow atmosphere amid the odor of ripening apples.

From the house to the parish church the villagers, at intervals, lined their single street, and greeted Zephirine—seated beside her father—heartily, if noisily ; having done which they, with one accord, fell in behind the carriage, to witness M. le Curé perform his part in the day's proceedings.

This over, they then trooped out of the church as they had into it, and from the church back to the house again hailed, like to a returned conqueror, the new-made wife that now blushed on the seat beside her new-made husband ; her father following in the next buggy, with his feelings well masked beneath the tan and the look carved on a wrinkled, clean-shaven face.

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At the house all were expected and all made welcome. Built in the days when things were made to last, the beplastered stone dwelling of the Duquettes, with its high wedge roof, low thick boulder walls, small windows, and mottled white-washed dignity, opened its doors to more guests than it could accommodate. But on the lawn outside, set off with the flower-beds Zephirine had daily tended, what more could one ask, on such a bright, warm day as this, than to sit and enjoy old Gédéon's hospitality there, and rejoice with him at the marriage of his excellent daughter? And so merriment was soon washing in and out of the house, and over the grassy plot about it, like an invasion of waters; while through the gate some distance away—beyond which the harvested country sloped mildly towards and into the horizon haze of the purple Laurentides—the people kept coming and going, especially coming, as if every soul in the village was on the move.

All of which was having quite an unexpected effect upon Isidore.

### III.

By the old-fashioned clock in Gédéon's house it was twenty minutes to four when Isidore claimed his wife for a walk in the orchard. Even to the words in which he made the request, Zephirine became conscious enough of a foreignness present—

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a shadowy perception that others shared in—as to receive a slight jar in sensation; but beyond merely remarking it—under several heads of the easily-explained—Isidore's scarcely noticeable paleness, shifting glances, and rather abrupt manner and conversation passed without serious comment. For a while the pair proceeded in silence, as though too engrossed of thought to speak. On Zephirine's part, so many memories uprose at every step, and wherever the eye rested, that speech retired in favor of recollection. But Isidore's mind ran in far different channels.

When well into the orchard the latter stopped, swept a glance about him, and then turned a look on Zephirine that instantly and vaguely alarmed her.

“ You will oblige me,” and Isidore's was the manner of one mentally occupied with two things at once, “ by explaining matters ? ”

Unable to make out him or his words, the wife stared in silent astonishment at one who now looked up and down and round about him as if expecting rain or a visitor.

“ Come,” he continued with metallic smoothness, bringing his gaze again to bear upon her ; “ come—the meaning ? There is a reason for all this, and I demand it.”

But it was beyond Zephirine at the moment—so fast had physical fear increased within her—to

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speak, act, or even cry out, and so, as Isidore paused, the two simply fell to regarding each other ; one battling with the belief that she had indeed married prophesied madness, and the other contemplating her with eyes of a hard brilliance.

Isidore's wait for an answer was of the shortest. Seeing that he was to be vouchsafed none, he looked over the trees and under them, picked up the apple that dropped at his feet, and, rolling this between his hands, slowly went on speaking again —still like to one divided in thought.

“I am not foolish, Mademoiselle ; nor am I”—

“*Mademoiselle?*” broke from Zephirine, finding her voice in amazement.

“Yes, ‘Mademoiselle,’ ” replied Isidore, throwing the apple away. “The Curé may tie, but the Devil undoes—and I renounced you half-way here from the church. If you do not believe me, go, divest you of your beads and uncross yourself, and ask *le Roi d'Enfer* if it is not so.”

“*Mon Dieu !* Isidore,” urged his now terrified wife, not daring to take another step away from those they could hear but not see, “let us return to the house at once. You are ill ; and the wise Doctor Morin is there,” and to clinch which she plucked him by the sleeve.

“*Laissez-donc !*” and Isidore shook himself free with an oath. “Did I not tell you I am all right ?

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Then why do you interfere? And change your wild look, woman, before I do it for you."

"*Ciel!*" was the cry wrung from Zephirine. Then she turned to run. But this only hastened matters. The next she knew she was jerked back and around again, and then thrust, with the ease of a straw-stuffed figure, into the crotching lower limbs of an adjacent apple-tree. There, plumb against the bark, and facing outwards, a straight escape was out of the question; and after noting that a red apple, slightly forward overhead, hung the redder in the blue oval formed by the sky and branches, and, also, that her cuff-lace was torn, and which she endeavored to tuck in, Zephirine finally and mechanically wondered what had happened. Then with a little gasp and shiver she straightened her knees for surer support, and stood face to face with Isidore and the realization that he, 'the brooding one,' had turned upon her from the altar with a repelling unnaturalness in his eyes and in every word and act. Chilled to the heart she shivered again, and then, almost without knowing it, started forward.

"Isidore," she besought, "has it come to this, and we barely turned away from the altar? Oh, for the sake of Heaven say that it is only wine that affects you, and that you will shortly be yourself again?"

But Isidore only flung her back.

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“I tell you I am all right!” he fiercely replied. “Yours is the head astray—not mine. You are become imbecile, and imagine of me what has befallen yourself. Ha, ha! I see it all! and the affair grows worse as I go. Why do you not answer me as I ask? It is not that you cannot, but that you are afraid to. Nevertheless, Mademoiselle” (the word, like the touch of heated iron, searing Zephirine into another start), “I can reveal to you what you would fain hide from me; and whether it is you, Dubuc, or the village, I have the power to expose plots and punish for them. Why did the people shout for you and not for me? Because you and that villain Dubuc well contrived it, Mademoiselle. You left your father for me, and now you would leave me for that intriguing poltroon and scoundrelly cousin of mine, Dubuc. You cannot”—

“Stop! stop!!” commanded Zephirine, weakly, and with a pathetic gesture. “Isidore, bethink you—it is your wife you accuse!”

“My wife?—no!” harshly, and knitting his brows. “You lie, Mademoiselle, to say it. You are not my wife; you are a conspirator against me with that fiend Dubuc. Have I not marked you with him, even this very day? It is impossible to deceive the eyes the Mother of God opens.”

“Isidore! Isidore!” and in sickening dread Zephirine cowered from him. “You are mad—MAD—to even think such things!”

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“*Silence!*” fiercely. “You are the one that is mad ; you and Dubuc and the people—you are all mad. You are all cunning in a grand scheme, and this is how it would work —ah, *bon Dieu!* a more diabolical affair was never conceived ! Listen while I scorch your ears with the truth, and shame you into everlasting perdition. Upon a certain date, Mademoiselle, you arrived at foolishness. In that state your brain brought forth, and becoming enamored with its production you carried it to my cousin Dubuc, who, all too willing, became one with you in black purpose. This was a compact between you and Dubuc and the Devil, friends all, by which Dubuc agreed to poison the mind of the people against me, while you did the same with me against them ; the Devil promising to bring it about, in purchase of your souls, that I should become an object of hatred in my sight and the sight of others, and so destroy myself. Having thus dis-honored me into my grave, you would then commit you to the care of Dubuc for a husband for four reasons, Mademoiselle : because he aided you, because he is not so ugly as I am, because he possesses more than I do, and because—after my father and me—the Labréche property goes to him. In all you would then have, Madame Dubuc, as I can easily and quickly tell you, one hundred and ninety-two arpents of land, one brick and one stone dwelling, two barns, one cowshed, and several

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smaller outbuildings, four ricks—two each of hay and straw—two hard-water wells and one cistern of soft, five horses, eight cows, a heifer and three calves, and, besides poultry and several dozen fruit-trees, a set of farm tools and vehicles not to be despised. Added to which is this inheritance here of yours, sure to you some day ; and as your father is an old man and failing, perhaps an early one. Then people will look upon you and your husband as next to our holy and reverend Father Proulx himself ; and with your importance and estate, the big politicians will come from town with something to drink, something to smoke, and something to put in the pocket, to hob-nob with the great Dubuc and bid against one another for his influence. All of which I commend to you, Mademoiselle—or if you like the sound of ‘Madame’ better, let it be ‘Madame the Assassinatress’ then—as a piece of ground too cursed to grow even weeds. Ha, ha ! have I not trapped you nicely ?—you, Dubuc, the people and the Devil. I will commence with you, and finish off with the Devil, and serve your black hearts as they well deserve. I will remove and reduce you till nothing is left. They call me ‘the brooding one,’ do they, and whisper and foretell me crazy ? *Bon !* we shall soon see whose head is the lightest. Now, Mam’selle Duquette, it is required of me to first begin by separating you from your wickedness. The means I have just

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procured in your own house. I throw this powder in your face" (producing a packet of Paris green), "you breathe it, you gasp—choke, and then, in spite of yourself, you open your lips and swallow. After that the end is sure; and when I have seen you to it, Dubuc will"—

"I took him against a father's wish; I took him in spite of friendly warning," Zephirine told herself in a white-faced babbling way, and with a look past Isidore as if she saw and addressed a spirit; "and now, *Mère de Jesu!*"—but here, in a senseless heap, and in all her bridal finery, she fell, face downwards, upon the red and white clover-heads.

"Ha!" and with an air of satisfaction, Isidore returned the paper to a pocket. "She yields herself—Providence still aids me—I can now strangle her like a child."

But in the act of stepping forward he stopped to stoop and peer around him beneath the trees. Upon straightening up he passed a hand over his forehead, like one struck by a new thought. Again he bent for another look. When he straightened for the second time, it was with a chilly laugh.

"*Dieu de grâce!*" he muttered, as though tickled, "the idea is not a bad one—'twill be the joke of the season. A painless mode, too, and one that spares these hands from soiling a white throat. Good! Isidore, you have a head that will astonish

## THE LAST LADY OF BEAULAC.

your enemies. Come, my excommunicant," hooking his limp wife up on an arm; "you are not for a green death or a throat measurement after all," and a few moments later, after a dodging, ducking and serpentine course among the low-branched trees, he laid his still unconscious burden down beside a cart containing three filled apple barrels.

Now it was the annual custom of Gédéon Duquette, Zephirine's father, to present his old school-friend, Mr. Larose, a banker in the city, with three barrels of apples; one—usually *Fameuse*—for eating, one for cooking purposes, and one of crab-apples to jelly and preserve. This pleasure Gédéon was again about to observe, having completed it to the point of hitching up and driving off, a final step that Narcisse, one of the farm-hands, was to take that afternoon.

About the time, therefore, that the stout Narcisse left off celebrating the marriage of his employer's daughter, by knocking the ashes out of his pipe to finish the bottle and harness up, Isidore had procured a hatchet and opened up the middle barrel of the three in the wagon at the lower end of the orchard, and which he found to contain crab-apples; Narcisse singing in a high minor key in the stable while Isidore muttered and—ignorant alike of the former's preparations and destination—emptied the barrel of the best part of its ruddy, waxy-looking contents over a wheel to the ground.

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Then as Narcisse buckled the belly-bands, Isidore headed and hooped a barrel containing but a remnant of its former contents, and on top of which, as though anciently crocked for burial, sat the doubled up, white-robed form of an insensible woman. Then, finally, as Isidore jumped down to the ground again, Narcisse led the horse out from its stable; and by the time the first saw fit to reappear among those of the house, the latter cracked his whip on his way to the city, four miles distant.

### IV.

“AHA! here you are! someone was looking for you,” wheezed old Ulric Turgeon, proprietor of the only store the village boasted, a general one on a small, very small, scale. “And what have you done with Madame, Monsieur?” he added, with feigned formality and a squint.

“There is no Madame,” answered Isidore, passing on.

“Eh?” queried the deaf Ulric, holding a hand up to his ear.

“I say there is no Madame Labréche,” Isidore, without stopping, turned to repeat in a harder and louder key.

“*Mon Dieu!* what does the man mean?” the stout, double-chinned wife of the blacksmith asked in an undertone, of nobody in particular.

## THE LAST LADY OF BEAULAC.

This was on the lawn in front of the house, and those nearest Isidore, catching his words, first scanned him and then one another. The bridegroom had left with the bride on his arm. As they sauntered off the rest had taken advantage of it for a running fire of raillery at the couple's expense, that Zephirine had more or less wittily met. Now Isidore returned alone, with glinting eyes, tossed hair, a broken watch-chain, crumpled cuffs, and the quick evidence a black suit sometimes gives of contact with raw wood.

*“Grand Dieu !* Isidore—what has happened ?” a voice asked amid a sudden hushing.

“Dubuc ?” demanded the latter, with his head on the move. “Where is Dubuc ?”

A dozen glances sought the man, and as they did so, Gédéon, about to rejoin those outside, halted in the doorway.

“What is wrong ?” his quick instinct prompted him to inquire.

“If Dubuc is behind you, let him pass !” half shouted Isidore. “And if he hides, I will have him, wherever he is. With one hand he sued for friendship ; with the other he would have undone me. But I have the truth in good time, and he shall rightly suffer for it.”

In sharp dismay, and with the swiftly implanted consciousness of something more dramatic yet to come, the crowd fell away in knots, to at last leave

## THE LAST LADY OF BEAULAC.

Isidore standing alone in their midst among the chairs and benches that besprinkled the grass in front of old Gédéon's house. And hardly was this shrinking over when the latter descended his three steps, and walked with dreading feet over to his son-in-law.

“Isidore Labréche,” he begged, “where is my daughter?”

“And I say where is Dubuc?” glared Isidore.

“That is no answer,” observed Bartel Dubois, a *habitant*, like his neighbor Gédéon. “Dubuc is not far off. I saw him a moment ago. You smile away from us with your wife, and return fierce without her. We ask for her, and you call for Dubuc. Your conduct is strange, your words unfriendly, and your voice harsh. In the name of Mary, Isidore, what does it portend?”

“Mind your own affairs,” was the retort; “I shall deal with you all in good time. The game is a deep one, a wide one and a hard one, Monsieur Dubois; but, poof! I can single-handed play you all sick of it—you, Dubois, Dubuc and the Devil. Ha, ha! *mes amis*; *bon, bon, bon!* have I not caught you nicely, eh? Make no—”

“Isidore!” sternly interrupted Gédéon, “where is Zephirine? She may be your wife, but she is also my child, and I have the right to expect to be informed of her when I ask it.”

“*Bon!*” approved the women; adding as one, “For shame, Isidore, for shame!”

## THE LAST LADY OF BEAULAC.

“I tell you,” shouted the latter, wildly, “that until I deal with Dubuc as I did with —” but to here see Dubuc himself coming from the house stopped him in a start forward.

“As you did with WHOM?” demanded Gédéon, in a flat, high key, and with a detaining grip.

“YOUR DAUGHTER!” Isidore answered, as, wrenching free, he again made for Dubuc.

And then, amid the shrill voicings of women, the deeper notes of rushing men, the tumult of those inside the house all trying to get out at once, and with Gédéon blankly sitting on a chair as though he heard and saw nothing, Isidore Labréche, foaming and gnashing and screaming things none could understand, was at length overpowered and bound like faggots, no one doubting that a man long held as half mad was now wholly so. There being no help for it, Isidore was next bundled into a buggy between Cleophas Moquin and Victor Trudel, who volunteered to take him to the city for committal as a maniac.

And barely had a light wagon, containing three barrels of apples and drawn by a single horse, followed the upper road to town in a turn to the left along the brow of the hill, when a top-buggy, in a cloud of dust, passed rapidly by in the rear, and kept to the first road in its straight course down the hill.

“Barrels! barrels!” shrieked a voice in the

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twilight. “Three barrels, ha, ha! filled with she-devils.”

“*Va-t'en-donc!*” hiccupped Narcisse to his horse, and giving it a cut with the whip as well, “I am not the only one tipsy to-night.” After which he lit and pulled away on his pipe, doubly enjoying a smoke and the effect of his previous potions.

This was at a time when the fire-bell at Aubry turned out the village *en masse* to a long and fruitless search.

### V.

IT was fully eight o'clock when the jovial Narcisse drew up in front of the banker's residence. On the way thither he had courted the worst—once with a trolley-car, and again with the city's charioting four-horsed water-tower; but thanks more to good luck than good driving, Narcisse managed to escape damage and annihilation both, and found the brown house he sought as much by sight as number, this being his fifth visit. The place was all lit up, he noticed, and with the whip and lines in his hand he descended to the sidewalk. No sooner had he done so, and tossed the horse its reins, than the polished and plated door at the head of the stone steps opened and let out a man in livery.

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"If that is for here," commanded that functionary, "move farther up; you are in the way."

Narcisse mouthed his pipe and let down the backboard.

"If you address me," he rapped back in reply, "go tell that owlly Denis Charbonneau that Narcisse is here, and that if he don't give me a chance at the best he's got, it's off I am with what I brought besides barrels."

Now, Denis was the butler, a position he had held for some time, and one he owed, moreover, to the good offices and influence of Gédéon Duquette himself. This was shortly after the former had left his native Aubry, with tender recollections of Zephirine—sentiments he had prudently kept to himself. And so he went to the city, where progress was more rapid, to make a home, and possibly bring Zephirine to it. But instead of a cigarmaker, he became a hotel-waiter, lost interest in Zephirine, and gambled and drank himself into a discharge. Then, with Gédéon to the rescue, he swore to reform, and did.

As Denis could not very well be in two places at once, and as Mr. Larose had invited a member of the Provincial Cabinet to dinner that evening, the absence of the first from the wedding is accounted for. The repast was to begin with the arrival of a late-comer, who drove up as Narcisse rolled his first barrel to the lower door, which, opening at his

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approach, revealed the shaven-faced Denis in full dress.

"I have but a moment to spare," the latter hurriedly said. "This affair to-night fixed me here to-day, or I would have been out. But you have come to tell me all about it. *Bon!* the best is yours in return—you shall have as good as you got, and better. Store the apples in the pantry, tie up your horse, and wait for me in the kitchen. The cook will"—but here, called twice, he skipped in again.

When Narcisse came to the second barrel, the unexpected lightness of it so surprised him that he shouldered it into the house.

"*Crapeau!*" swinging it down in the pantry beside the first. "At this rate a hand is all the next needs. Old Gédéon doubtless intends a surprise for Monsieur Larose."

But the full weight again of the last barrel caused him to curiously concern himself over the extraordinary difference. If anything the last barrel was heavier than the first—it certainly proved more troublesome; and the humor it put him in, as he twirled it to a place beside the others, vented itself in a kick at number two.

"There, *maudit!*" he said, brushing himself, "what sort of a puzzle is this?"

Then he shook it, tipped it, let it fall again—standing end for end as it had in the cart—and now bent down for a sniff.

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“I can make nothing of it,” he, straightening up, finally said with a shrug. “Apples are at the bottom, and something lodged above them. Ah, *sacré*! I think I see it! Remi packed the barrels according as Gédéon instructed, and, winking to himself, left my curiosity to pique itself over the matter. He thinks to pay back old scores, and laugh later, does he? Good! I won’t say a word about this.”

As he was leaving the pantry, however, lit with the ghostly radiance from an arc-lamp in the street, a moan behind caught and held him in the doorway. For a moment he superstitiously listened, with strained attention and a half-turned head. The noisy passing of an electric car just then, that shook the house, partly mended matters; but barely was it by than the sound repeated itself, coming, apparently, from or beyond the barrels. Narcisse chilly wavered between an act of fear or one of bravado. Then he shivered, crossed himself, and chose flight, closing the door with alacrity, and bolting for the kitchen—only to meet with Gabrielle, the housemaid.

“Goodness! Narcisse,” she exclaimed, shaming him into a sudden standstill, “but you are in a hurry; it quite robbed me of the *salut* I was about to make you. Denis told me you were here, and I hurried down in welcome. You bad man! why do you not come oftener—not to bring something, but to see us. However, Denis said you

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would be hungry, and that I was to look after you; and we shall talk to one another over a little supper of our own, like the big one upstairs. And you shall tell me all about the wedding; and listen, Narcisse" (nodding), "there may be another soon. If you do not believe me, ask Denis what he thinks of Louise" (the table-maid). "But here our tongues are going as if we had nothing else to do; and you do look hungry. *Mon Dieu!* you look pale, too. Have you seen a ghost?"

Narcisse roused himself. "A ghost? no," brusquely. "It is the kind of cats you keep here; they would raise the hair on even a bald head. *Allons!* let us have something to eat, I'm famished!—light in the middle, and all in the upper story. At the least, a little food will help chase the queer from me, for I'll swear it was an omen of the wedding that I was haunted with half the way here."

"Good or bad?" breathlessly asked Gabrielle.

"Decide for yourself," shrugged Narcisse. "As I turned on to the *Côte* road, some drunken fool shouted, 'Three barrels, filled with devils!' and ever since that I have felt that something really was in them that should not be there. But I later forgot this to watch for and whip up out of danger until, arrived here, I began unloading Remi's work, and what do you think I found? Two barrels heavy, and one so light that I nearly

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fell down with it. What do you make out of that? *Rien! correct!* so do I. Well, what follows? I examine the odd barrel; I shake my head, and am about to go, when, *sacré!* what do you suppose I hear? A hollow groan! *oui, certainment!* just like you read about. Well, I am a little bit startled, but I wait; and presently, by every button on my coat, Gabrielle—and may they fly off if it is not true—I hear the same sound again. It may be from the inside; it may come from the outside; but—but as this is not my house, and as I have no business to poke about it, I—I forsook the mystery for you, Gabrielle. What do you make of it?"

"This," and with a light laugh she slipped an arm into his and led him off. "This, Narcisse, not that you have taken too much, but that you imagine too much. *Viens!* come and dine with me, and drink the bride's health in a new fashion. *Comprends-tu?*" And after a moment's thought, and with a sheepish nod, Narcisse assented.

## VI.

BENEATH its crimson-shaded candles, and a ceiling studded with glowing bulbs, the banker's table glittered in special array. Conversation sparkled like the champagne; and, at intervals, popping corks punctuated the flow of both.

On the banker's right sat the Cabinet Minister;

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besides whom and the ladies there were present that evening M. le President du Club Dollard, M. le President de l'Institut Impérial de Commerce, the French and Belgian Consuls, Viscompte Barrière, Dr. Leduc, author of *Le Microscope en Médecine*, and the Seigneur of Beaulac.

The dinner wore on towards fruit.

Narcisse and Gabrielle enjoyed themselves below in the knife-room ; and an hour and seven minutes after the pair sat down to their jollity and a discussion of the things that Gabrielle, with the cook's connivance, had provided, the former was called to the speaking-tube.

“Narcisse,” said the quick voice of Denis, “open the Fameuse barrel and pick out a basket of the best for Gabrielle to polish and bring up.”

Narcisse carried the message to Gabrielle.

“Now, while I will do much for Denis,” he emphatically declared, “it is not that much. I am done with those barrels—let someone else make their acquaintance.”

“Bah !” and Gabrielle rose and drained her glass. “I gave you credit for more courage, Narcisse. You drank a foolish fancy with your Aubry wine ; and mine, instead of better, has only made you worse. If a woman must shame a man, but point out the barrel and I”—

“Get me the tools,” Narcisse redly and thickly spluttered, “and see how long your words last. I will not only open one barrel, but ALL.”

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“Bravo!” and Gabrielle clapped her hands. “You are yourself again. And you will open the light barrel first, Narcisse? Good! Let us begin, then, before you have time to repent.”

With the hammer and chisel that Gabrielle quickly brought him, Narcisse set to work. Gabrielle fearlessly shut the door behind them, turned on the electric light, and after pulling down the blind, helped herself to some nuts from one of the shelves.

Knocking off the top hoops, Narcisse next attempted to pry up the cover. But it fell apart, inwards, instead, in three pieces; and the first he knew he found himself gazing—as soon as shock allowed the recognition—upon the death-like features of the newly-wedded wife of Isidore Labréche. The head lay back in a one-sided droop, like one asleep in a chair; the mouth being wide open, the eyes half lidded, and the pallor upon the face intensified by the incandescent light almost directly above it. The satin wedding-gown, with all its silk and lace accessories, surrounded the wearer in a sad crumple. Narcisse stared in a clammy fright, unable either to move or speak.

Having cracked the walnut with her foot, Gabrielle bent down and carefully gathered up the pieces. The kernel she put in her mouth, and the shells in a pocket. This done, she became aware of silence, and, munching vigorously, looked

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around. At once and unpleasantly mystified by the pose and expression of her companion, she edged and craned forward to determine the cause. A shriek, and then, as though shot, Gabrielle threw up her arms and fell, thereby releasing Narcisse from his stupor.

“O, *Coeur de Christ!*” he now stuttered in horror. “Zephirine!! Murdered!!!”

At these words he lifted up his hands, dropping the hammer to the floor and the chisel into the barrel, the latter striking Zephirine on the forehead and drawing blood. The effect upon Narcisse was even more pronounced—not only had he discovered the dead, but mutilated it; and, stricken by revelation and the part he had played in a foul crime, he, like Gabrielle, threw up his arms, but with a bellow, and encountering the frail glass of the small electric light above him smashed it—and plunged the room in gloom. Gabrielle lay on the floor at his feet, and Narcisse fell on his knees beside her to pray. But this was attempting the impossible, and no sooner was he down than he got up again. Then, in a stupefied way, he tried to leave the room. The darkness could not be called black, bluishly mellowed as it was by the rays of electricity faintly streaming in from the street, but it was dark enough, in contrast to the light of a moment ago, to completely lose Narcisse his head and bearings both, so that when he finally found and opened

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the door and lurched sideways through it, Zephirine lay head and shoulders out of an overturned barrel ; and that when he at length, and without meeting a soul, stumbled from the house, she had recovered consciousness ; and that, finally, when Narcisse drove off—still in a daze—with the idea somewhere at work within him that he must reach Aubry without delay, Zephirine was out of the barrel and weakly attempting to rise.

### VII.

THE Seigneur of Beaulac was a genial man, a witty one, and a noted *raconteur*.

Towards the close of the dinner reference was made to a mystery in the city, then engaging the public mind. A family, back from spending the summer in the country, were, the second day of their return, startled by unearthly screams in the basement. Even from the street the shrieks had been heard, the cries being described as agonizing ; a state of affairs that lasted for several days, and finally compelled the family to leave. From the top to the bottom, repeatedly and unsuccessfully, was the house ransacked for a clue—and there the matter stood. Everyone had heard of it, and all were more or less acquainted with the creepy details. But the Seigneur did not believe in the supernatural and very politely said so.

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"Perhaps some of you recall the story of the Lady of Beaulac?" he continued. But some did not, including the Cabinet Minister, and the Seigneur was induced to go on.

"I only referred to it," he apologetically began, "to illustrate how easily otherwise sensible people are influenced by the mystical, and how mercilessly old-time credences are handled by modern thought and investigation. In other words, the appearance of the Lady of Beaulac was an accepted and corroborated tradition in our line for many generations back, so much so that it was quite family treason to question it. But when my good father died and the seigniory passed to me, I did what I had long promised myself to do. After a couple of stimulating failures, I finally proved, to more satisfaction than mine merely, that no ghost walked the shores of Beaulac, much as the moonlight and shadow, reflecting water and one's own imagination, as well as certain elemental conditions, might picture it. But there were still the nocturnal sights and sounds in the seigniory itself to be accounted for, and to pair these with their natural causes took not a little of time, patience and money. But I triumphed in the end, and how I did it follows after I have introduced the Lady of Beaulac to you as she was firmly believed and said to have more dramatically introduced herself to others in days gone by."

In a finished way, therefore, and amid silence, the





"The door opened and admitted a woman in white" p. 90.

## THE LAST LADY OF BEAULAC.

Seigneur now narrated the tragical fate of Madame D'Aubut, in 1640, whose death resulted from a stab in the face, dealt by her husband on their wedding-day. Jealousy in a man madly in love is something to shun. Whether D'Aubut meant to kill, or only to mar, remains a matter of conjecture, as the same hand destroyed both. Some maintained that disfigurement was the sole intention, and that when D'Aubut found he had driven to the brain instead, he put a quick end to his own existence. Since then every generation of the family had produced its witnesses who swore that with their own eyes and ears they had seen and recognized and heard Madame D'Aubut in one or both of two places, and in very much the same fashion. Then as favored with a general hush the Seigneur went into the weird details, and explained what the spectral visits were held to foretell, the door opened and admitted a woman in white, with a pallid face, the air of one from the grave, and a small gash—like a dagger thrust—in her brow.

The Seigneur never forgot the sensation of that moment. Among the first to catch sight of her, he broke off for a fascinated stare; and when next he involuntarily rose from his chair, half the company, with their eyes as his eyes and all focused on the same object, followed suit.

“Is this a hoax?” asked the thrilled Seigneur, as soon as he was able; “or do I indeed look upon THE LADY OF BEAULAC?”

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“Oh, messieurs, your aid, I implore you!” was the wailing response. “This is my wedding-day, and my husband would kill me! Oh, do have pity and protect me!”

The dinner was at an end.

Most of the men were required at their places by the condition of the ladies beside them. But the Cabinet Minister was a cool, resourceful man who looked at matters very practically, and getting up from the right of his helpless, speechless host he walked over to Zephirine, now supported in the arms of the astounded Denis.

“Madame,” he gravely said, “there is no law like British law, and this is a British country. If it takes troops to do it, your right as a British subject shall be respected. Your husband, Madame, will be at once incarcerated.”

But Isidore was already that; and because they shackled him, and gave him nothing with which to harm himself or his keepers, Isidore Labréche, in a padded cell, left off shouting and cursing and beating against the walls, for a sullen, stubborn refusal of all food that could and did have but one result.

And Zephirine, after all, did marry Dubuc.

## A CROWN COURIER.

### I.

THREE stones through the diamond-paned windows were enough. The fourth in his hand Fabien flung at the setting sun, then blocking the end of the road on which he stood. Recollecting himself, however, he now picked up a fifth, and having placed it on the gate-post, departed for the village.

This was in 1837, a year memorable in Lower Canada for the events that took place at St. Denis, St. Charles and St. Eustache.

The deserted Choussereau homestead—one of whose windows Fabien had just broken—occupied a lonely spot. Tetu village, a mile away, lay hidden behind a low pine-clad hill ; and the rough road on which Fabien disappeared ran westward through solemn woods, clumps of white birches, a few firs, and numberless hawthorns. Where the ground was not stony it was swampy ; and with autumn's advance, scarlet leaves and berries, golden-rod and fireweed, and the flashing of ivy, invested the locality with wondrous hues and contrasts.

However the Hon. Louis Papineau may be regarded as an agitator, he was in every sense of the

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word a patriot; and with Sir John Colborne and his troops on the move, checking those forces the former had awakened, this period of Lord Dalhousie's administration had little to complain of in the way of monotony.

• • • • •  
About two hours after sundown, three mounted men, one leading a riderless horse, drew rein opposite the old Choussereau house, and dismounted.

“Fabien has come and gone,” remarked Zoel, knocking the stone off the post.

“And left the window signal,” added Theophile, eyeing the house.

“If he will but hurry back with something to eat,” growled Marcil, wiping a slobbered sleeve, “it will be the best amends he can make for the attention his beast has given me.”

Zoel, who was in command, tried the gate, and finding it stubborn, finally smashed it in with a foot. This done the three now passed in to the rear of the premises, where, within a small straw-thatched shed that awaited collapse, they tethered their horses; and having given these a rough-and-ready grooming and a nose-bag each, they left them to themselves and without much difficulty effected an entrance into the house. Here Zoel's first act was to open the front door—he had to break the lock to do it—while Theophile fastened the board shutters over the window Fabien had broken, all the rest

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being shut, and likewise protected by board shutters, as Marcil, having induced a lighted candle to stand by itself, went outside as far as the road.

“Can you detect any gleam?” Zoel asked him, upon his return.

“None whatever.”

At this juncture Theophile joined them. “There is some furniture upstairs,” he remarked. “Shall we go up, or bring it down?”

“We are best here for our purposes,” Zoel answered; whereupon they all proceeded to furnish a lower room with what the house afforded of the useful—a table minus a leg, two doubtful chairs, and an old-fashioned clothes chest. After a minute’s search outside, Zoel found a short stick, which, after a little ingenuity, he made do duty for the missing table-leg.

A quarter of an hour later, and the long-drawn tremolo of a loon was heard.

“Fabien!” exclaimed Theophile, in an undertone, and going out by the back way he answered it. Two minutes afterwards and both entered the house, Fabien carrying a basket.

“We are all good Catholics here,” grinned the latter, displaying some cooked fish—two suckers, an eel, and a good-sized doré—“and this is the best I could do in meat. ’Tis a pious place, that Tetu, and it would not do to demand other than this flesh of a Friday. However, I had better luck in

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the other things I secured; and I thought of Marcil when I managed to procure three bottles of wine, more honest than potent."

"Knock the neck off one at once, then," Marcil answered. "Good or bad, the stuff is ahead of a soft throat-wash. You owe me the deed—the lower half of my left sleeve is yet wet with the nosing your horse gave me. Where did you get the things?"

"All in one place, the first I came to. They were supping when I knocked, and would have it that I should join them, but I contrived to get out of it. There was an old man with the squarest jaw I have seen on anyone; a dame not quite his age, and two good-looking daughters. I tendered them money on leaving, but they were above accepting it; and with my tramping, and the odor of cooking I got, I could now sink my teeth in leather."

"We are all one when it comes to appetite," Zoel observed. "How about the messenger—have you any word of him?"

"None," said Fabien, shaking his head. "I was twice on the point of asking, but in the end I held my tongue; and as for my ears, they gave me nothing."

"No news is good news, then," said Zoel, with an air of satisfaction. "The fellow is yet to pass. Had he already done so they would have assuredly spoken to you about him. We are in time; and

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while he comes we can dine. The front door is ajar, and the night stilly—we can listen as we eat."

This was at twenty minutes past ten. At one o'clock they cast lots—Fabien being exempted—for one to watch while the rest slept. Theophile drew the short stick with a grimace; and without any loss of time the luckier ones—Fabien and Marcil curling up on the floor and Zoel stretching out on the settle—lay down and instantly fell asleep.

## II.

AT two o'clock—an hour later—Theophile had hard work to keep awake, but his best antidote against nodding came in another ten minutes, when, leaving his post at the front door, he hastily entered the room and aroused the sleepers.

"Up! up!" he cried. "I hear hoofs."

The effect was magical. In the act of rubbing their eyes the rest arose, pinched and punched themselves into wakefulness, and at once left the house. After a minute's listening—convinced that Theophile was right—they hid by twos on either side of the road. On the horseman came, barely discernible in the darkness from the beast he bestrode, and when nearly abreast and between them, the four sprang forward. What next took place occurred with surprising swiftness. Before the rider could pretend at resistance, Zoel had him

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to the ground and on his back with both hands in his powerful own ; Theophile, with nothing else to do, looking on, while Fabien caught the horse by the bridle as Marcil felt its flanks.

“ We are four to one,” said Zoel, sternly, as he and Theophile now assisted their prisoner to his feet, “ and you are completely at our mercy. Any attempt to escape, and we shoot.”

“ It is the man we want,” Marcil came round to say. “ Nothing but the spur would give the mare the wet coat she has.”

“ Into the house with him,” said Fabien, “ while I stable his horse;” and leading off, the rest followed, Marcil bringing up the rear with a large stone. This he set against the hall door to keep it shut, Zoel having broken the lock to open it ; Fabien joining them by the back way in time to light the extinguished candle.

### III.

“ My faith ! ” exclaimed Zoel, surveying the stranger, “ we have a beardless youth for our pains. If his voice is like his face it will be soft. Be seated, gentlemen, and let us get to business. Shut the door, Theophile, and place your chair against it. Monsieur stands at our pleasure.”

The latter was slim, clean-shaven and short. The eyes, however, were not only large and lustrous,

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but set in pale features. Theophile scanned their prisoner from his seat at the door, as well as he narrowly could by the flame of a greasy candle. As he did so it was to no one's notice but his own that he began a decided fidget with his fingers ; and so fast and strangely did a feeling of uneasiness work upon him, that he twice tried the trick of turning away his head and looking smartly back again. The second time he was successful, and before the other could withdraw his glance their eyes met. Thrilled by he knew not what, Theophile thenceforth bestowed a riveted attention upon one who mysteriously moved him ; but there were no more looks cast in his direction.

“Two hours and twenty,” said Zoel, glancing at his watch. “The morning warns us. You will save time and trouble, Monsieur, by handing over your dispatches without delay.”

The latter, standing and facing Zoel at the foot of the table—Marcil and Fabien being seated on the settle by their leader's right—made an involuntary movement, but no more.

“Come,” continued Zoel, “we have no desire to commit further violence. But if you will not do as we ask of your own accord, you compel us to do it for you.”

Was Theophile keenly mistaken, or did a terrified look—too swift and intangible for the others to notice—cross that face ?

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“*Diable!*” said Marcil, sharply. “Have you lost your tongue? There are other ways of making you answer than by putting questions.”

“The boy is frozen with fear,” Fabien carelessly observed. “There is a little wine left. A drop of it may revive him.”

“The stuff is poor enough,” Marcil rejoined, “but too good to waste on his kind.”

“Silence!” enjoined Zoel. “Why do you not speak or comply, Monsieur? You know what it means otherwise.”

In the short pause that ensued, each could hear the other breathing. Then the stranger, having clasped and unclasped his hands, at length folded his arms with an air that puzzled the others.

“I bear nothing from one leader to another,” he at last said, in a modulated tone.

Marcil uttered a derisive laugh. “Had you said,” said he, with an unpleasant grin, “that you bore no communication whatever, no matter to whom, you would have lied, Monsieur. Your words testify to it, and but whet curiosity the more.”

“*Pardon!*” and if Zoel addressed their prisoner with more severity he was still polite about it. “We are not here to dawdle. The affair is simple enough; why hesitate? You are overpowered and yield your papers. Then you go free. You escape nothing by delay—force will give them to us in the end. You have two minutes in which to consider,”

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and pulling a heavy silver timepiece from his pocket, the speaker laid it down before him on the table.

In the fall of this second silence, the table conveyed a ticking to all parts of the room. Zoel leaned with his arms on the table, and eyed the person at the other end of it with a fast-gathering frown. Fabien looked on with his usual carelessness; while Marcil, beside him, watched the object of their united contemplation with a devouring gaze. These four were in the middle of the room.

To one side, on a rickety chair, sat Theophile, with his back against the door. The nearest of any to their prisoner, he neither once stirred nor took his eyes off this person, after intercepting a glance that had so queerly tugged on his inmost being. Apart from his companions, the present proceedings diverted all attention from him. Otherwise the ferret-like nature of Marcil would have been quick to note, and slow to pass over, the start he gave when the stranger next spoke. Theophile took the profile dimly presented to him, the voice he had just heard, and the form and habiliments of their owner, and studied them, scrambling in thought for the key to a mystery.

Zoel now replaced the watch in his pocket.

“The time is up,” he said, “and ends our forbearance. If you have anything to say, Monsieur, we will listen to you before it is too late.”

An indescribable gesture was all this evoked from the other, whose lips moved soundlessly.

## A CROWN COURIER.

“The fellow is witless,” snarled Marcil, rising as he spoke, “and holds us in check for one to act for him. Ah, *sacré!* would you?” and, forward in a trice, he wrenched away the stranger’s drawn weapon. “My faith!” he sneeringly continued, “but you are fine handling. A fool for the sending, and the fool sending you an ass. Your strength well matches a fancy face; I could as easily tussle with a bundle of hay. Perhaps you have some more such useful things as this about you? Or shall we try for all at once?”

“None! I have none! Oh, for the love of God, gentlemen, pass me on my way. I have nothing to give you.”

“Which is not saying that you have nothing to be taken from you,” retorted Marcil; “and if we must relieve you by force, Monsieur—”

A crash by the door, and Theophile arose from the ruins of his chair. The appeal of the captured new-comer smote him in revelation, and he started to his feet—for what? And the question sat him down on his decrepit, loose-jointed chair again with such force that it fell to pieces. Now regaining his feet, with a leg of the broken chair in hand, he furiously approached the pair.

“Who told you to interfere?” he demanded of Marcil.

“And who told you?” Zoel jumped up to angrily ask. “Back to your door, Theophile.”

## A CROWN COURIER.

"Marcil is within his rights," said Fabien from the settle. "The fellow was going to shoot."

"Go back to your door, Theophile," Zoel again commanded. "Your fall has had a foolish effect upon you. Here, Fabien, help Marcil search the prisoner."

The blood rushed to Theophile's face, and with a quick blow of the chair-leg he sent Marcil's pistol from his hand to the floor. Rapidly possessing himself of this next, he gave it to their prisoner, producing and cocking his own, while amazement held the others in check.

"The first man, Zoel," he now said, as calmly as he could, "that attempts to do your bidding must first deal with me. The prisoner is now under my protection."

Marcil looked up with a scowl from the hand he had good cause to rub, careful, however, to remain where he was. Of an easy-going nature, Fabien saw his way out of the difficulty by taking Theophile's place at the door; Zoel, meanwhile, wavering between rage and policy.

"Seize him!" the latter at last and harshly bade Marcil.

"Which?" feigning ignorance.

"The prisoner, you fool! Whom do you suppose?"

"*Ma foi!* it now takes more than one for that. Try it yourself."

## A CROWN COURIER.

With an oath and a glance of contempt, Zoel was about to do so; but Fabien waved him still from the doorway.

“*Arrête!*” this person cried. “It is death to do what you are about to—Theophile never boasts—and I cannot help and guard the door both. Ah, Holy Mother! Zoel, what are you about now?”

“This,” responded the latter, drawing and levelling his own pistol. “We have gone too far to think of turning back—and you have become a traitor to your country, Theophile. Out of the way with you and your thwarting, or blood and dishonor will mix.”

A cry—a rush—and the cause of all stood between. Zoel knew little of fear, but he nevertheless drew back a degree.

“Lower your weapon, Monsieur,” was the unexpected injunction he now received. “The act discredits both your sense and perception. Your conduct is regrettable—it should shame you. The day breaks in another hour, and already the infamous has been transacted. One of you, Messieurs, would be brutal, one insolent, a third cowardly, and the fourth chivalrous. The last is the only man among you. He would defend a woman.”

Zoel’s slow-dropping arm now fell to his side altogether, and his determination changed into that of a childish stare.

“You lie!” Marcil vengefully ground out, nursing his hurt. “It is a —”

## A CROWN COURIER.

Theophile had not yet relinquished the chair-leg, but he did so now. It flew straight for Marcil's head, who, dodging, arose in time to receive Zoel's hand over his mouth, and to hear in a savage undertone—“*Fe'me ta gueule!* you bleating calf. Who knows who passes?”

Marcil thrust the hand from his face and stepped back, as Mademoiselle turned to Theophile and laid a hand on his arm with a look that softly reproached his impetuosity. Too rushed of thought for utterance, the latter could do no more than raise her gloved hand to his lips, at which Mademoiselle crimsoned and snatched it away—but the light now in her eyes was not one of reproach. Fabien, at the door, here gave a sheepish cough and felt uncomfortably large; completing a crop of the incidental that was all reaped in a few seconds.

Having admonished Marcil, Zoel turned fiercely to the others. “Madame or Mademoiselle or Monsieur, sinner or saint, whichever you be,” he rapped out, “we await your pleasure another minute. If it is not peace then in the obtaining, it shall be war. Draw, Marcil, and see to your priming—draw, Fabien. A rim of light is surely in the east by this time, and we trifle with fate.”

“Friends,”—began Theophile.

“Another lie!” interrupted Marcil, presenting his pistol. “I can pierce the word in your throat

## A CROWN COURIER.

for the"—when a blow from Zoel sent him sprawling on the settle.

"You would finish what Theophile has begun, would you?" and Zoel stood over Marcil threateningly. "Rise, you cur, and help with a shut mouth, or as sure as your name is Brisebois the room will coffin us all." Then wheeling about, he, walking forward, peremptorily ordered: "Madame or Monsieur, whoever you are, give up your communication before we take it from you."

"Search him!" Marcil prompted from behind, jeering rather than following. "Search him!"

"Never!" said Theophile whitely, throwing himself between the two. "I urge nothing upon you, Zoel, but this woman is my promised wife."

Marcil was ready with a disbelieving laugh as Fabien whistled in surprise; but barely was Theophile rid of his last word than Zoel, with a very stern and steady look, eyed him to say—

"Repeat what you said, Theophile, and kiss your scapular."

With but the briefest hesitation the latter drew the sacred thing from where it hung in his bosom—when a hand was laid on his arm and a voice whispered :

"You shall not thus blacken your soul with perjury. More, it is sacrilege! See, my trust is gone from me!"

"Treason!" cried Zoel. "It is a plot between





"Marcil being persuaded to blink the while at Mademoiselle's pistol"—p. 105

## A CROWN COURIER.

you. You would damn your soul for a woman, Theophile."

"Not so," and Mademoiselle held up a tiny missive: "this saves it to him!"

"Hold!" and Theophile clutched it from her. "You are terrified into betrayal, Henriette!" upon which he rushed in the direction of Marcil, where the candle spluttered. Fearing the worst the latter fired, but his excited aim only buried the ball in wood. A moment later and the room was broadly lit with the flaming of oiled paper. The next instant it consumed on the floor between two struggling men, Zoel endeavoring to stamp out fire, and Theophile determined that he should not; Marcil being persuaded to blink aloof the while at Mademoiselle's pistol, and Fabien more than ever convinced that his place was at the door, from where, at intervals, he invoked short prayer on a dreaded outcome.

## IV.

ALL was over almost as soon as begun, and nothing now remained of the paper but the charred remains, which the feet of the wrestlers ground into an unsightly floor-spot.

Theophile was overmatched in reach and endurance; but just as Fabien would have implored them to stop, Zoel stepped on the chair-leg Theophile had flung at Marcil. This put him on his

## A CROWN COURIER.

back in a heavy fall; and thus aided, the supple and well-nigh breathless Theophile tore loose, and regained his fallen pistol.

“I desire nothing by unfair means, Zoel,” he now said, as well as his short breathing permitted, “and therefore free you up.”

The other painfully arose, rested his greater weight on one leg, and then, limping to a chair, sat down.

“I am not to be outdone, Theophile,” said he from it; “you let me up—I allow you to go. Go—go as you please. Let them pass, Fabien. Our plans are all for nothing; we are defeated in the moment of triumph. I have the honor to bid you adieu, Mademoiselle! Your courage becomes your face; I admire both. As for you, cravens” (to Fabien and Marcil), “be off with you out of my sight. Back to your firesides, *canaille*, and spin wool with the old women—’tis all you are fit for.”

“But how could I leave the door?” and Fabien tried hard to look hurt.

Zoel covered him with a disgusted expression, and then waved him to leave. “Don’t try to explain,” he said; “you only make matters worse. Put the same binding now on your tongue you did on your assistance. I will choose other than butter-hearts to my aid next time.”

Fabien flushed, and started to open the door. But Theophile was before him, and thrust him

## A CROWN COURIER.

aside before he could pass out, saying : “The lady has the preference ; neither you nor Marcil touch a horse till afterwards.”

The same moment Mademoiselle crossed over to Zoel, and timidly touched him on the shoulder.

“ You have been harsh, Monsieur,” she said, in a low voice, “ but you are also generous. And I, too, can be generous. Sir, bestir yourself ! The troops are moving this way ; they are but an hour’s march from here.”

Forgetting his twisted ankle, Zoel jumped up, only to sink back to his chair again with a groan. At the same time, Fabien, straining at something with a hand to his ear, called out :

“ It is not fancy ! not the note of a bird ! There was the faint fan-fare of a bugle on my ear a second ago, but this now to it is surely the tap of a drum.”

The dying candle here gave a leap and went out, and a few beams of early morning light at once straggled into the darkness of a chamber also veiled in silence. But because of the birds outside, none could say for certain whether Fabien had been deceived or not. The alarm was taken, however, and Fabien and Marcil glanced as one at Theophile, who still commanded the doorway.

“ *Sacré !* ” and—a thing he seldom did—Fabien swore in his anxiety. “ You go too far, Theophile.”

“ Make a dash for it,” suggested Marcil. “ He

## A CROWN COURIER.

dare not shoot. Ah! why did I not think of it before!" and he immediately ran to the boarded window.

"Quick, Henriette; be quick!" urged Theophile; "or you are forestalled."

And, hand in hand, and with Theophile glancing back to see that they were not followed, they hastily quitted the house.

"But you?" Mademoiselle asked a moment later from her saddle, and with a quick indrawing of her breath: "Why do you not also mount?" Then, with the truth upon her and a little *mouse*, she continued: "Come, then, if you must be invited. *Vite, vite*, Theophile, and mount!—I bid you. You were ever the same—waiting to be asked—fearful lest you were not wanted. It is a long time since we saw one another, and you have not changed. I now have grave need of you, foolish man. Do not leave me, as you did once; I—I cannot l—leave you. We shall n—not desert one an—n—nother again, *chevalier!*"

At this Theophile's burning glance swept a rich red tidal wave over the face of the faltering speaker, that left a warm glow behind it.

"I shall not leave you this time," he somewhat unsteadily said, and with his eyes searching hers, "until you bid me go. That shall be—when Henriette?"

There was a shy droop in the saddle.

"Never!" a voice answered.

## A CROWN COURIER.

The word was barely whispered, but Theophile caught it ; and, almost before they knew it, the lovers, most strangely reunited, and with past differences thus effaced, found themselves galloping up the road through the light mist and morning fragrance towards Tetu village.

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

### I.

To first see Bazile Dupras and his wife was from the steps of the Bonsecours Market, on a January afternoon. Both day and month were on the wane, and the overcast sky had commenced to release down the first flakes of another snowfall. The bustle and stir of sellers who had come to market and were now going home made up a scene no less interesting than practical; and as the *bon-hommes* let down the shafts of sleighs backed up in a long row against the edge of the sidewalk, and led out their horses from the snow-covered, cobble-stoned yards of a century or two, the medley was one of rare variety, value and contrasts.

In time with these proceedings, the stall-keepers on the street started to shut up shop as well.

Onésime Larocque gathered the rabbits, sucking-pigs and dressed poultry displayed on the counter-front of his little place of business, and shelved and hung them away inside. His place—as were the rest—was of about the dimensions of a good-sized packing case.

Hypolite Trudeau, next to him, who sat all day

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

on a high stool and puffed off the tobacco he sold, now descended, emptied the ashes out of his pipe, and began taking in his *habitant* mittens, socks, yarn and tobacco. The last he kept only in the twist and the tied leaf; while the former were as warm as gaudy—which is saying a good deal.

Pushing back his “pulldown,” Maxime Nantel scratched his head, and, seeing no further prospect of business, pulled his cap forward again and commenced to put away his brined eels and herrings, dried fish and tub pickles for the night. Likewise Octave Thérien did the same with his pails of cleaned beans and peas, the wing dusters he kept, and the line of bright-colored carpet slippers that hung in a dangle overhead.

Damase Gourgeon was nothing if not neat. His butter plats were wrapped in linen, and reposed on fresh towelling. The spread of newspapers beneath the latter hid the boards over three barrels. Such served as a counter. Here he stood all day, winter and summer, soliciting custom from the street by the sidewalk; and as he now transferred his butter, maple sugar and pans of two-sort candy into his sleigh, brushing the snow off them as he did so, he joked with the youthful Napoleon on the steps.

The latter, whose sole stock-in-trade consisted of a few sticks of spruce-gum, had just been worsted in a gentle encounter—whether gallantly or helplessly would be hard to say. Perhaps a portion of

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

each is nearer the mark. As it was, two good-looking girls of his own tongue, class and scant means, after laughingly passing him twice, now stopped—and audaciously admired him for his wares. Napoleon sheepishly presented them with a stick each ; after which, with all the arts and graces of a French parting, his fair persuaders left.

“ My faith ! ” winked Damase, folding up a towel. “ If you keep on selling that way your gum will go fast enough. The loss of two *sous* is not to be sneezed at. How many have you left ? ”

Napoleon counted his ill-shaped sticks of chewing gum. “ Six,” he replied.

Damase tossed the towel into the sleigh and began undoing his butcher’s apron. “ Six ? ” he repeated. “ And how many bought ? ”

Napoleon again counted—coppers this time. “ Seven,” he answered.

The apron followed the towel, and Damase took off his shop-sleeves. “ *Mon Dieu !* ” and the sleeves went after the towel and apron, “ you had better bring your sister with you next time, or they will come back and rob you of the rest.”

Napoleon’s reply is not recorded, for just then Achille Tourangeau and his friend Edouard happened along, recking little of what a day lost to them so long as it found enough to eat and drink —especially the latter. Coming to a stand opposite Napoleon, the first threw away his “ blackstrap,” and demanded a change of chew.

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

“A cent a stick,” said Napoleon, firmly, liking neither his breath nor his behavior.

“Edouard will bear me witness,” solemnly hic-coughed Achille, “that we lost all our money on the races.”

Edouard gravely corroborated this. “It is the truth,” he said. “We put up *piastres* to pennies, and our pockets went back on us.”

Napoleon looked uncomfortable. “Where was this,” he asked—“on the river?” (referring to the ice-trotting that annually takes place in front of the city.)

Achille coughed again, and this time grinned. “*Non*—this was an affair in the country. Edouard matched his mare against the priest’s pony, and she went lame before the finish.”

Napoleon was not convinced; but he broke a stick in two and gave half of it to each.

“*Merci beaucoup!*” said Achille, closing an eye with a bite of his portion. “When the mare runs again we will let you know—you may be able to make on her,” and with an exaggerated bow he and his friend departed.

“They played and caught you for an innocent, *mon ami*,” chuckled Damase, fastening up the back of his sleigh. “Two gone for a smile, and one because of the priest’s pony! Ha, ha, ha! if you believe all you hear your head will lead you a hard life.”

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But Napoleon's only reply was to button up his shabby yellow frieze covercoat, drop the remaining sticks into a pocket, and hobble off for home.

### II.

A SQUATTY, grey-shawled bundle with a head to it—such was Madame Dupras on the seat of a low box-sleigh, awaiting the return of her husband. The latter now emerged from the market.

“*Tiens!*” said his wife to him, as he was passing her to get the horse from over the way. “The dumper—pick it up.”

Bazile halted and looked around. The tin lay beside one of Damase Gourgeon’s barrels, and seemed more his than their’s; but, stooping, he did as directed and picked it up.

“Is it ours?” he dubiously asked.

“Do as I tell you,” placidly commanded his better-half; and, as a man without choice, Bazile added it to the things in the front of the sleigh.

“A taste before you put it away,” said Bazile next, to Damase Gourgeon, and laying down a cent he was off across the street with a lump of the buttermen’s resin-like candy in his mouth. A few minutes later he returned with the horse, and letting down the shafts began to hitch up.

“How has the day done by you?” a rustic acquaintance near him inquired, engaged with a

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

steed as shaggy as Bazile's own, and running the reins through the collar rings.

Bazile munched away on his candy for a moment before replying.

"Well enough," he at length answered, twisting a hold-back round its shaft, "if one is content with a little. I sold my oats and turnips, some potatoes and a basket of onions; but as for the parsnips, *vierge!* I might as well have left them at home."

"You forget," his wife reminded him, "a lady bought my cream, and praised it highly."

Bazile's eyes twinkled as he tied together the clothes-lines that served as reins.

"True," he replied, now producing his pipe and filling it. "And but for me you would never have brought it."

After which he lit his pipe, turned up the collar of his greatcoat, tied a heavy scarf around it, and clambered into the sleigh. Then adjusting the worn brown buffalo-robe comfortably over them both, he tucked it in and sat down on his end of it, took up the reins, and—after a look around and a few loud farewells—started the venerable steed for home, over and beyond the river, with flick of the whip and a half shout.

"Bazile," protested his wife, as they drove off, "you are forever amusing others at me—why do you do it?"

Bazile slapped the horse on the back with the lines, and turned a corner.

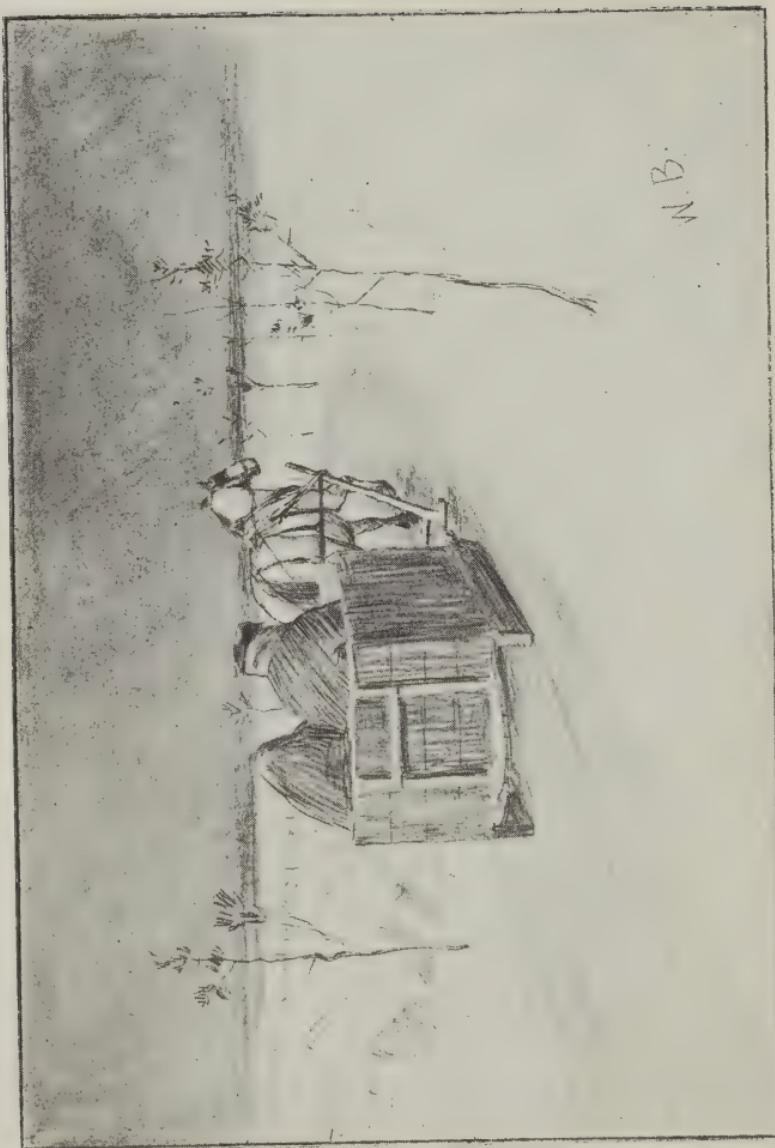
## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

“Because,” he replied, humorously, “we are one; and whatever smiles back upon the wife laughs also at the husband.”

“Bah!” shrugged the first, taking him seriously, as she generally did. “You are getting childish as well as old—a man turned sixty should have other thoughts. And your conduct, too!—it is almost beyond belief. If I am content to stay at home and knit at night when the young enjoy themselves, why should you bestir yourself as you do, going here, there and the other place of an evening? making believe that you still know how to dance with feet clumsy beneath the years upon you, and fooling yourself to think you can yet say the same sly things to others you once did to me. As if I do not know all about it, *mari*, even though I do not go with you. These are great goings-on for a man of your age, and some day the young men of the village will take and lock you up for an old nuisance.”

Madame spoke in quite an ordinary tone and manner, while Monsieur,—a second Mr. Caudle—complacently pulled away on his pipe, guided his horse, and had a keen eye to the pass of things about him. Bazile chuckled, but deigned no immediate reply; and in silence they reached the frozen surface of the river and began crossing it. Had the day been a bright one, the spread of unsullied snow before and about them, miles in extent, would





"Madame dumpy in an iron-grey shawl . . . beside . . . her homespun-suited husband"—p. 117.

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

have dazzled the eye. But the snowstorm then setting in blotted out all but the nearest of surrounding objects; and along a road staked out with defining evergreens ambled the horse, at its own gait, low-headedly drawing the humble blue-bodied, red-runnere sleigh into and out of *cahots*, up and over and down snowy mounds, and past many a gigantic, striking, and sometimes grotesque heap of shovèd ice; Madame dumpy in an iron-grey shawl on the seat beside the broad person of her homespun-suited husband, and the bronze, wrinkled, clean-shaven face of the latter, with its well-chiselled hook nose, cast in a philosophic mould. A bundle of hay covered the rear contents of the sleigh; and on the whole the picture presented was one that some would turn twice to look at. The approach of a sleigh in front put Bazile to one side of the road, and nearly upset them in doing it.

“*Ciel!*” cried his wife, thrusting a hand out of her shawl to clutch him by the arm. “You will have us over.”

“Sit still,” Bazile composedly advised, “or you will.”

“You would not have said that to one of the demoiselles at Cedelie Perron’s last party,” was the quiet rejoinder.

Bazile’s eyes reverted to their ready twinkle. “You are right,” he acknowledged. “She would

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

probably have lacked your weight to balance the sleigh, and we would now be out of it."

"Pah!" exclaimed his wife, but not ill-naturedly. "Is that my value to you—sleigh ballast? It is a mercy I am not as spare as Madame Cadotte then, or by this time you would have disowned me."

"Eh, *bon Dieu!* not quite so bad as that, I hope?" and Bazile affected the utmost concern. "Because I delight to be young again is no sin."

Madame Dupras drew the shawl and rug closer about her before replying.

"It is not only what I think," she now responded, bestowing a brief glance ahead of them, "but what the neighbors say."

"Truly," returned Bazile, more than ever amused. "And this is what they say, Rosina: 'Bazile, he is a great boy! full of fun, and as ready for mischief as the youngest of us.' What is wrong with that?"

"Nothing," with something like a sigh. "I am not jealous; but you are not the man I once knew, or you would never leave your own fireside at this time of your life for the frivolity found at others."

Bazile removed his pipe for a moment, and brushed the snow from his lap.

"You are wrong, *femme*," he at length and half seriously said. "You are still the pride of my heart." (The other shrugged indifferently at this.) "But the children are married, and gone their own ways, and the house is not what

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

it used to be. Guillaume was tall and broad and pleasant-spoken, but the sound of his laughter is no more heard among us. Marie-Louise had a sweet voice, but where are her songs to-day? And the little darts of sunshine from Rosalie, the joking mischief of Adrien, and Philomene's coaxing—where are all these to-day? Not at home, Rosina, where you and I live, and where from one day to another they once cheered us on. For those were the times, *femme*, after the fire that took all but our children, when we toiled from early to late—hard as we had worked before—thankful for the little we got, and blessing the good God that He had not seen fit to withhold even that from us. And through all of that struggle, *femme*, as well you know, the babes that Heaven sent us put new courage into our hearts, and gave us of gladness later. With better days, Rosina, we have grown old, the house has been emptied of its children, and the peace we so long strove for is at last upon us—but only half of happiness. For my heart is young, whatever I may seem in years, and yearns after the gaiety of old ; and if I sometimes visit the hearth of another, it is because youth is there, and the pleasantry of it renews me.”

“ But,” persisted his wife, “ if it is as you say with you, what about those you and I know, equal to you in age and hard knocks, who are content in homes as vacant as ours? They do not grumble

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

that the family they raised are dispersed to their own fortunes—why should you? They are not unhappy—they are satisfied; they rejoice to think that the children they brought up now have children of their own to look after, even though it separates them. Why, then, should you rebel?"

"They have no spirit," shrugged her husband. "I am yet strong, while they begin to fail."

"*Misère!* what a man!" was the matter-of-fact retort. "Old age is having a fine effect on you, *bonhomme*. You have not even the charity to conceal from me that were I out of the way, you would lose no time in courting another. I do not believe a word you have just said about the children, for you were ever strict with them. It is high time for me to choose a young *gallant* to take care of me till I do go. Perhaps then, *mari*, there will be nothing to complain of in the way you remain at home, or the attention you bestow upon your wife. If the neighbors must gossip, it may as well be about one as the other; and as for spirit, they will have mine to commend as well as yours."

As if in surprise at such a sentiment from Madame Dupras, the horse stumbled, and Bazile's sharp jerk on the lines as he shouted "*Y'iens-donc!*!" swerved it from the road. But in the snowstorm and fading daylight this was not perceived.

"*Batême!*" Bazile jocularly observed, giving the horse its head again. "The folks would have

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

plenty to talk about if you did that. And your *chevalier, femme*—could you bring yourself to believe in him as you do in me? Bethink you, is his arm as strong as mine to protect you? or his feet as sure as my feet for you?"

"*'Sais pas!*!" shrugged the other. "I only know that he will be young and good-looking—what more does it matter?"

"The idea is a brave one," chuckled Bazile, "and worth trying. Suppose you search at once for your handsome stripling, *ma chere*—he will be useful to both of us. When not in attendance upon you, I can present him tasks that worry."

"*Comment?* I do not understand."

"He shall have duties," twinkled Bazile, "that make light of his efforts and plague him."

"But," conclusively, "you will have nothing to do with him—he is mine."

"Maybe," rejoined Bazile, "but I will have no idlers about the place. Let him make love to you as you like, he must earn his right to live. There is wood to be cut and drawn and split, and old as your husband is, *femme*, he will swing an axe and fell a tree while your *gallant* is in his first chops."

"I will not choose me this fellow for a wood-cutter," calmly, "but to keep me company while you are absent conducting yourself in a way that makes people shake their heads, and you simpleton enough to think that they clap your behavior on

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

the back, instead of hiding a laugh and calling you an old fool behind it."

Bazile could contain himself no longer, and removed his pipe for a hearty guffaw, a sound that made the horse prick up its ears.

"Oh, it is all very well for you to make little of it now," his wife continued, in a mildly nettled way, "but wait, Bazile; wait until"—but here an ominous cracking, and the half-leap upwards of the horse with a shrill note of fear, ran the speaker's words into a shriek.

Bazile prayed and swore both, and savagely tugged on the lines, but too late. His haunched animal slipped and slid within the glassy zone surrounding an air-hole in the ice, and drew the sleigh in an uncontrollable glide towards the open centre of it.

### III.

How Bazile ever did it is one of those things we accomplish with little or no wish to dwell upon afterwards.

Spinning round on his seat he seized his stout wife, with no more ceremony and the same ease-lifting power he would a bag of grain, and, standing up with her, he deliberately and yet with the utmost alacrity placed a leg in turn over the back of the sleigh, and from the footboard descended to the bending, detonating ice. Six strides put them

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

out of danger; and laying his burden down, Bazile faced about in time to see the last of his sleigh follow the horse to disappear under the ice in the chill, dark, engulfing waters of a strong current. Bazile's efforts had cost him his cap as well; and bareheaded, grey-locked and silent he stood in a heavy snowstorm and falling darkness, midway between the unseen shores of the broad St. Lawrence; his pipe still in his mouth between clenched teeth, and fifty thoughts for every flake that fell upon his pate.

It was not so much the loss of his horse, as it was an old one; yet, nevertheless, having labored faithfully for him, it deserved a kinder fate. Nor was it the sleigh, for he had made it himself and could make another. In fact, as soon as Guillaume heard of it he would offer to buy both for him—which he had no intention of permitting. And the potatoes, the parsnips, the empty market boxes and baskets, the beef, tommy-cods and crockery he had bought in town and was taking home—it was not the loss of all these things, small or great, that claimed his thoughts at this moment, but it was the reflection in devout thankfulness of a simple-minded nature that the Blessed Virgin, and the God of the Pope and the priest, had condescended to aid a son and daughter of the Church in the hour of awful danger. Bazile repeated a few words of praise for their miraculous deliverance, and turned from

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

regarding the floating bundle of hay for an equally dazed look at his wife. This person had just struggled out of her shawl, and in attempting to rise, caught sight of the wisp of hay also. With her head in a whirl, she had yet only half comprehended what had befallen them, and to now descry nothing but first Bazile and then the hay—the latter like a bequest from the departed—at once gave her the other half of the truth. To all but regain her feet she became entangled in her shawl again, and clumsily fell down ; where, plainly confused, she could do no more than wriggle like a turtle, and muffle out, “Oh, *mon Dieu ! mon Dieu !* what has happened ?”

Bazile’s mood was shaping into one strangely foreign to him. “Hold your tongue !” he roughly said. “If it has nothing but foolish things to ask, let it ask nothing. You know very well what has happened.”

Rosina wrestled free of her shawl at last, and sat up.

“Bazile—your cap—you will catch cold !” she said, in a queer, strange way ; and then began to cry.

Bazile was an old man who, from his youth up, had heartily detested to see anyone in tears ; and the sight now of his wife in this state, together with a reaction of things, put him in a bad humor —a most unusual frame of mind for him.

“Get up,” he snapped, “and leave weeping to

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

children. If we must pay this price for our lives, I do not begrudge it ; why should you ?”

It was not so much his words as his manner of reasoning that put a new train of thought into Rosina’s head ; and amid all the emotional clash upon her just then, she could think of nothing but the subject of their conversation before the accident. At the recollection of it she began to sob loudly, as though unable to control her distress, and to rock from side to side as if the power of grief within swayed her in its escape.

Bazile contemplated her unmoved for the count of twenty. Then he removed his pipe and shook out its contents, saying, “ If this is your thanks to the Virgin, Madame Dupras,” dropping the pipe into a pocket, “ she is surely less quickly to aid you in your next plight. And your *gallant*, Madame—how would he have accomplished for you in this piece of business ? *Vierge de Christ !* it is to my mind that you would both be beneath the ice of this river. Come, drop your folly ; get up, and let us be off. The spot is cursed, the night all but on us, and I have no wish to linger. We have four miles yet before us, but the hail of a passing sleigh may give us a lift home.”

“ Ah, have mercy, Bazile !” wailed his wife between sobs. “ I wronged you, *mari*, to speak the words I did. The lips uttered them, but not the heart. I but jested, truly, thinking that they

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

would be taken in earnest, and that they would force you to yield yourself to my selfishness. I was not angered at you, Bazile ; I did not blame you for seeking to enjoy the pleasures adversity had robbed you of in your younger days ; but your poor old wife, who cared little for these things, did feel grieved that she should be left lonely at times when you made merry away from home. Yet as freely as I forgive you for all, Bazile, may I not hope for pardon from my man among men ? And to think that we might have parted from this world and from one another a few short minutes ago, with such bickering spirit between us, has wrought me into a state I cannot conquer. Oh, Bazile, my husband, you have saved me, not from death, but from everlasting shame !”

“ Wife,” Bazile unsteadily said, moist of eye for the first time in fifty years, “ we are both wrong —both to blame. Why did we not think of it before ? We shall invite the young to our own house, and blind Dominique shall fiddle for them ! And when the time comes that they must go, they will sigh and wish to come again, and say, ‘ Old Bazile and his wife, Rosina—ah, it is something to be asked to their place ! They live all alone in a big house, and their children are grown up and scattered ; but they are as young as the youngest of us, and we do have such a good time !’ Come, my dear, let us be going. We have met Death, and

## A COUPLE IN CONCERN.

defeated him. Nay, by his very attempt upon us we are born again and back to youth, even in the dusk of this day and our declining years," and assisting the weighty Madame Dupras to her feet with the utmost deference, the speaker and his wife—a regenerated couple—trudged off arm-in-arm towards the road and homewards, faring through a thick fall of snow that fast hurried the wintry twilight into darkness ; poorer in worldly goods, it may be, at the end of the day than the beginning of it, but richer in the gain of a new happiness, and a new understanding and spirit.

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE.

### I.

IN a house on the Deschamps road, that runs through the village of Poulinville, at twelve minutes to eight—to be exact—on a certain December evening, three men sat at the kitchen table; one reading from a letter, the contents of which stamped the features of all with marked seriousness.

As in most French-Canadian dwellings of its class, the kitchen was more or less the living-room; in consequence of which the walls were seen adorned with pictures grave and gay, and, for the most part, unframed.

Conspicuous among these was an oleograph of His Eminence the Pope; one of St. John, with staff and halo; a mourning emblem—a white and violet wreath of immortelles, enclosing the photograph of the late Madame Lafraimboise, once joint head of the house; and, lastly, another oleograph, depicting Good triumphing over Evil—the Romish Church *versus* Satan. These, together with a print of the thorn-crowned head of Christ, were the only ones that were framed.

The room was a lesson in neatness. Every





" . . . You are again suspected" — p. 129.

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article had its place, and there it abided. The bare floor was as clean as scrubbing could make it ; and as for a trace of dust, a watch would hold it all and say nothing about it.

On a home-made shelf on one side of the room, a cheap clock ticked back the same continual terse answer to the simmering song of the kettle on the stove ; and except for these sounds, the reader's voice was all that broke the silence.

Toussaint Laframboise was a man of about forty, short, thick-set and pock-marked, and with hair and beard as black as crow-feathers. Determination and an everyday plainness divided the face between them, the eyes affixed therein being clear. His companions shared his appearance, and a guess as to age ; Cyprien Boutellier being hardy rather than handsome, and the color of Michel Gadbois' skin resembling that of a dried tobacco-leaf.

The letter, as laboriously deciphered by Toussaint—due to an educational lack at both ends of its handling—was from Terrebonne, and, translated, ran as follows :

“ My dear brother,—I fear for you. Some enemy has spilt the news, and I am a day late with the wind of it. One of them (the revenue police) leaves for Poulinville this week. I nearly put my foot in it poking for what more I could learn. It is the truth ; you are again suspected. But the

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE.

soup is sometimes lost between the plate and the mouth, and if you make haste—*bon !* All may yet go well.

“Your brother,

“HORMISDAS LAFRAMBOISE.”

“*C-r-a-p-e-a-u !*” burst from Cyprien as Toussaint finished ; and then at a loss to master the tumbling of his thoughts, he stared in weighty silence at the others.

Michel drummed on the table for a moment with his fingers, and then leaned back in his chair ; while Toussaint, after laying down the letter, took out a red handkerchief spotted white the size of quarters. The room registered 67 Fahrenheit, but he mopped his brow as if it stood at 90.

“We can easily take the still to pieces,” he now went on to say, in the same undertone in which he had read, “and have the laugh on the fellow for his pains. But,” returning the bandana to its pocket again, “it’s a hailstorm in my head to know what we are going to do with seventeen puncheons of as good whiskey *blanc* as was ever made, that will have to be hurried into hiding before the night is over. I lent Gustave the horse and cart this morning” (there was not enough snow yet for sleighing) “to carry potatoes to town with ; his own broke down, and there he is till to-morrow.”

Michel unfeelingly knocked to the floor the cat

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE.

that here jumped into his lap, and vigorously swore in a stage-whisper—but not at the cat.

“The fool! the idiot! the simpleton! Must we suffer because his beast of a wagon breaks down! *Sacré!* the place is cursed! Neither love nor money will give us the use of another to-night. Every rig that can carry is away to the Painchaud’s by this time, where there are great goings-on at the wedding.”

Toussaint woke up as if out of a sleep.

“Ah!” savagely, “the dog of a borrower! I now see it all. That is why he came to me for mine; and the fellow drove off without even thanks. *Diable!* may the black rot have his corn next summer! Angels pray for us, what a fix!”

“You may well say,” Cyprien thickly observed, with a few portentous waves of his hand. “And meanwhile, *M. l’officier* no doubt approaches in his own *voiture*, and we idly sitting here like sparrows on the warm side of a fence in winter. Up! let us be doing something—if only to mark the man as he comes in.”

“Bah!” exclaimed Michel, contemptuously. “Put yourself with some sense, Cyprien. I always said that fear would frost you for a stupid. Why should this man come to-night?—we have no hotel.”

“Smart fellows like you,” maintained Cyprien, with a shrug, “that think you know everything, are the kind that rest your feet and walk on your

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hands afterwards. You shiver in the cold because the fire is not good enough for you. Why should the man not come to-night? And as for a place to put up at, he is welcome in the first house he comes to ; and, sinner or saint, who is to know him for which ?”

At that moment a child of five toddled into the room and up to Toussaint, whose expression at once relaxed from stern to soft. It was a life for a life ; for of the years of the daughter living, the mother had spent them in another existence.

“ Eh, little one, not in bed yet? *Ma foi!* I’m afraid father forgot you for once, my precious !” lifting her up into his arms as he spoke, where the cuddling babe, after a shy glance at the others, nestled against the parental homespun and immediately fell asleep. If only the slumber-god would visit some of us as easily as he did that chubby innocent !

Michel regarded the picture they presented with cold curiosity—and came to the point.

“ Please yourselves in the matter,” he again shrugged. “ Squeezing grain is a golden trade, but it is also an affair of consequence to be caught at it a second time. Twice dragged before the courts, and, not to speak of the fine or imprisonment, we are marked men for all the profit a treble risk gives us out of the business afterwards.”

“ Correct !” assented Toussaint, half to himself ;

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE.

“I begin to have the same mind as Cyprien in the matter. Suppose that spy-fellow comes this evening. Make yourself easy, my friends, that he will try for us without losing time, and give of surveillance all that he has. Question yourselves, then, what can be done, with his eye on us, before he searches? *Sacré!* what is to prevent him from making this house his rendezvous the moment he comes?—and wink with himself to do it.”

“Bah!” shrugged Michel, “this is all talk for nothing. He may not come for days—if at all.”

“Not so,” Cyprien energetically responded; “Toussaint is not the one to see a bear for a bullock—he is right! I have it! the deepest shadow lies nearest the light.”

“*P'rquoi!* explain yourself?” asked the puzzled Michel.

“You boast yourself of a stout heart,” Cyprien continued, fixing a steady gaze on him, “and taunt me with the lack of it. We will try both.”

Michel shifted uneasily in his chair, but returned the look without flinching.

“Well—what is it?” he asked.

“*Ecoutez!* We shall go up the road and wait—*immédiatement*. If this man comes, we shall take charge of him, and use his own conveyance for placing the stuff where none but a mad person would think of looking for it—in *M. le Curé's* cellar. He is away at the wedding, and leaves Telesphore

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE

in charge. I can vouch for the man's aid—his soul is sly, and he loves his glass—and then we can return *M. l'officier* that which we borrowed of him, with our compliments, and snap our fingers at him afterwards for all that he will be able to know, do, find, or prove against us. The place is deserted ; there is no one about ; and the night is dark. None will be in a hurry to leave the fun at the Painchaud's ; and if he comes not—well, where is the harm ?”

“ And meanwhile,” Michel dryly answered, “ a wheelbarrow would do the work for us while we wait, and save us who knows from what.”

“ There is more against than for your words, Michel,” Toussaint conclusively announced, folding the sleeper in his arms as he arose. “ If the man comes we will act, otherwise nothing can be done to-night. We will do as Cyprien says. Get on your coats while I lay the child down. We have not a moment to lose.”

But the plans of men and mice “ gang aft agley ” ; and, on both sides of this game of bagging, the highly influencing personality of a rather diminutive individual was never taken into consideration.

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE.

### II.

ON Toussaint's return, Cyprien helped him into his overcoat—a native frieze with the wear of iron in it. Buttoning up this, and having already put on his rubbers and cap, Toussaint, last of all, wound a gay *habitant* sash around him—a family heirloom—and the three now left the house.

The night was unusually dark. In addition it was snowing, in a way that fast carpeted the earth and muffled sound.

Cyprien's dress differed somewhat from that worn by the others. Not only was he minus the sash, but instead of boots and rubbers he had on a huge pair of felt stockings, that reached to the knee and fitted into a pair of gross-sized "gums." A man could stump the North Pole in such wear and ask his feet if they felt cold.

Pulling up their *capuchons* as they struck out into the middle of the road, the three proceeded off in a bunch together, and were soon engulfed in the darkness and falling snow.

With his hands in his pockets, Cyprien detailed his project to the others as they buffeted the storm with the wind in their faces.

A quarter of a mile away, where the road reached its highest elevation between the mountains, they would wait in comparative shelter. There they might smoke and talk as they pleased, and act,

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE.

if needs be, with more certainty and freedom. With their eyes accustomed to the gloom, it would be an easy matter to pick out a stranger. Cyprien did not exaggerate when he asserted that their ears would tell them long in advance of sight whom it was that drew near. The jolting of every cart or sleigh shaft ; the gait of each horse (Canadian pony—none tougher) ; and the voices of those driving, would, together or apart, unerringly inform them of any strange approach.

In the end the plan mutually agreed upon was, that Michel should step to the horse's head while Toussaint and Cyprien gained the vehicle from opposite sides ; it might be on wheels, it might be on runners ; which was impossible to say. If a sleigh, so much the better. Should there be more than two in it, no attempt would be made. But one or two, *droit ou tort !* there was to be no hesitating. Toussaint and Michel each had a sash. Let the latter give his to Cyprien, and (Toussaint undoing his own) they could want for nothing better to bind with. This advice was at once acted upon, Cyprien loosely coiling Michel's sash below the right elbow, after Toussaint's example. Then relapsing into the silence of made-up minds, they pushed their way through the clodding snowstorm, with bent heads that hardly for a moment contemplated serious, if any, resistance to a scheme that promised much by its very boldness.

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And following well to their rear, with God-given instinct and the blind faith of a child in its father, trudged Toussaint's only child and daughter ; coatless, hatless, mittless, rubberless—nothing but housewear on to protect her against the wintry night ; and ever and anon repeating in an endearing treble, "Papa!—papa! Where is my papa?" a wee round piping call that the wind brusquely bore away in the wrong direction.

### III.

MICHEL had just used the second match on his second pipe when a hand was laid on his arm, and the voice of Toussaint whispered—

"Listen!"

The other removed his clay, puffed, spat, drew a sleeve across his lips, and then strained his sense of hearing to the utmost.

After the lapse of a still minute, the faint sound of snow-clogged hoofs and wheels could be heard.

"Cyprien will have his desire," Michel observed, in a sarcastic undertone.

"He is ready for it," was the grim response.

"To your places," commanded Toussaint. "If this is our man we will have enough to do without talking."

Cyprien obediently crossed over to the other side of the road, facing Toussaint, while Michel moved up a few paces from the latter's left.

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE.

Two minutes later, a light top-buggy, containing a single occupant, behind a tired, but spirited horse, came into view.

Toussaint now started towards it, keeping to the edge of the road.

“*M'sieu—une allumette, si'l vous plait.*”

“Whoa!—*y'iens-donc! Qu'est que-dit?*”

“A match, if you please.”

“Yes; I have one. *Arrête-un-peu!*” and, dropping the reins, the other commenced to unbutton his overcoat.

Toussaint's keen eyes told him all that he wanted. “*Correct!*” he cried; and in a trice the struggle was on.

Michel caught the horse by the head as Cyprien sprang to his side of the carriage; while the object of their united attack, reaching for matches, divined the true purpose of all in time to grasp the revolver-butt sticking out of an inside pocket his hand encountered on the way. This he at once produced, cocking it as he did so.

“*Sacré!—arrête-la! In the Queen's name stop, or I shoot!*” he called.

But the blood of both Cyprien and Toussaint was now up, and they seized the pistol-arm at the same moment. *M. l'officier* was a courageous man, but no match for two such opponents; and in a struggle in which he was fast being over-powered, the weapon went off. At once his

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE.

wounded horse reared with a shriek of pain, jerking the light Michel upwards—before he had time to even think of letting go—hand-fast to the bridle beneath a pair of air-pawing hoofs. Then, losing its balance, the horse fell, overturned the buggy, and landed with crushing force upon the unfortunate Michel, wringing a solitary cry of agony from him. Cyprien, too, had suffered by the upset, and now groaned on the ground under a wheel, disabled by the hub striking him on the hip. As for Toussaint and the officer, both were pitched headlong to the ground, wrestling as they fell, there to renew their panting struggle as the horse—on a broken shaft and tangled in harness—beat the devil's tattoo on whiffletree and dashboard.

“Have you had enough?” gasped *M. l'officier*—the odds now in his favor.

“I never know when that comes,” Toussaint managed to say, working his way to the revolver.

“Be it so then!” and the first, unable for anything else, tussled towards a one-hand grip on the throat.

And then, in the midst of their heavy breathing, as they squirmed so locked together that they seemed one, and swore with what little breath they had left, straining a bone-and-muscle creak, and turning, twisting and rolling in the snow till they donned a thick white—the horse meanwhile planting heavy knocks in a vain attempt to rise—a little wailing cry found its way through all.

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE.

“Papa!—papa!”

Toussaint shivered, as though he had been shot instead of the horse. An idle fancy, truly, but curious that it should come to him at this time; and finger by finger he continued to persuade *M. l'officier* that he should relinquish his hold on the pistol.

“Papa!—papa!”

Toussaint shivered again, and the chilly twist down his back was more pronounced this time. But he still fought on, undeterred by this or any other form of imagination.

“Have you had enough yet?” *M. l'officier* asked as well as he could, his strength commencing to give out.

“No,” was the savage reply, “we have but begun.”

The officer's endurance fast failed him. And Toussaint, desperate to know what it now meant if he did not free himself and fly the country, had one, two, three fingers off the revolver-butt, and would soon have put the fourth with them, when, for a third time, he heard—

“Papa!—papa! Where is my papa?”

“Let go, I tell you!” he now shouted, in a fierce effort to break away. “The child!—the child! *Mon Dieu!* have pity on her if not her father. The horse may kill her.”

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF A BABE.

"You—are—my—prisoner," came from the prostrate officer in short puffs.

"Yes, yes!" Toussaint replied, beside himself with mental torment, "but let go first," and, seizing his opportunity, he dealt the other a clumsy side blow in the face.

The latter may not have been much hurt by it, but he was exhausted, and springing up Toussaint hastened from him. A minute later and he returned, with the babe bundled up in his overcoat. The revenue officer he found sitting up, and, notwithstanding the falling snow and the darkness, with a pencil and open notebook in his hand.

"Your name is Mr. Toussaint Laframboise?" he remarked, as Toussaint came up.

"Yes," was the simple reply. "Michel is dead, and Cyprien hurt. But the child is unharmed."

## A SONGLESS CANARY.\*

### I.

EVARISTE broke the tenth commandment and coveted, the cause of this mild if positive deflection in good morals being the bird his opposite neighbor owned.

It was not that he seldom saw or heard one—quite the contrary, for they sang and flew about him the livelong day, whilst he tilled and tended the patch of ground that went a good way towards supplying the frugal wants of himself and his wife during each year. But a songster in a cage, he thought, would well be worth the price of forgiveness towards those, also of a feather, that were up betimes in the morning searching for spring-sown seed, or nipping the early lettuce leaves with their disfiguring bills.

But in the winter-time, when the ground was as flint beneath the snow upon it, and the beard of icicles that fringed the roof glistened in the early sunshine with prismatic steeliness, and cast tapering shadows on the frosted window-panes, the season was on

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\* Awarded first prize (\$100) in the Short Story Competition instituted by *Massey's Magazine* in 1896.

## A SONGLESS CANARY.

that compelled Evariste to smoke his own-grown, home-cured tobacco in a warm corner of the kitchen, where he worked upon the baskets and small rude wicker rocking-chairs the French-Canadian peasantry fashion for a ready market.

The voice of Madame Clavette was neither shrill nor sweet ; and many a time and many a day did her patient, uncomplaining husband, in the midst of his occupation, either wish the past summer back again or the next to hasten its coming, that he might once more dig and delve in his garden and listen to the bird-notes about him, rather than the monotonous chit-chat of a tongue from which there was then no escape.

Evariste sighed ; but the voice of a canary was not to be purchased with the same ease as the voice of a wife, for where, *mon Dieu !* was he to find the courage, not to speak of the money, to pay out over two *piastres* for a bird, when his wife eyed the spending of every *sou* ? *Parbleu !* he would as soon sow thistles for a crop.

And the hands that plied the wooden straps on the seat of a *chaise berceuse* belonged to a man whose brain was oftentimes busy with such thoughts ; and if he sometimes sighed, it was a sigh for the impossible.

## A SONGLESS CANARY.

### II.

WINTER and spring were gone, and the summer was yet young, when the startled Evariste, roused by the close whirring of tiny wings, looked up one day from his work in the garden, in time to note a yellow streak in the golden sunshine that disappeared in the open window above the little porch.

Slow of manner and speech, Evariste for once forgot both in the haste with which he exclaimed "*Noiseau !—et jaune !*" and procured a ladder. Cautiously mounting this, he next gained the top of the porch and closed the shutters ; a few minutes after which a green cage—old-fashioned and bell-shaped—that he had preserved from second-hand harm in the shed, at last came into use, and once more held a living occupant.

The latter was slender and handsome, of an unmarred golden-yellow, and with a tail as white as the snowy edging of his wings.

Evariste eyed the new-comer in silent wonder for a whole minute. Then with a thump on the table that frightened the bird into clinging to the wires, he said, "There is not his like in L'Epiphanie to-day."

"Bah !" shrugged his wife, eyeing him as she had the bird. "He can't sing a note."

"What do you know about it ?" asked her husband, with less reticence than usual.

"Lots. Fine feathers make fine birds, but the

## A SONGLESS CANARY.

cry of a peacock goes with a graveyard. The thing is pretty to look at, but, *Dieu de grâce !* I'll warrant you his voice is hoarse rather than clear, and more fitted to croak than sing."

"It has ever been a famine to my wits," Evariste replied, with a wrinkled brow, "how you come by the ill-natured thoughts you do. You are fond of looking at the dark side rather than the bright, and seeing bad where evil is absent. Wild or tame, woman, the bird is mine ; and whether he sings or not, 'L'Petit' has come to stay."

"As you wish," evenly answered Madame Clavette. "But the thing eats, and we have no money to spend on good-for-nothings."

"*Le bon Dieu* sent him here," Evariste responded, devoutly crossing himself ; "and though birds sometimes die of hunger, souls are not so easily saved from everlasting torment."

Upon which the speaker proceeded to select a spot where he might hang up the cage ; whilst his wife, after a look at him and then the bird, went back to her duties with a clouded face.

## III.

"EH, *bon Dieu* ! what did I tell you ?" exclaimed Madame Clavette three days later, as her husband whittled a new set of perches for the cage : "The bird can't sing a note!" and she burst into a derisive laugh.

## A SONGLESS CANARY.

"We'll see—we'll see," quietly answered Evariste, though sorely nettled at his wife's want of feeling. "'L'Petit' is shy, and the place strange; but time will try his throat—have no fear."

But the days built weeks, and the weeks months, without a warble from "L'Petit" other than a tremulous little plaint, most pathetic to hear.

Songless he might be, but Evariste came to love that bird as he did his life. Twitter and chirp, one short bar of a sweet song, and sometimes a long-drawn trill of piping clearness, was his whole and daily wont of call. Whenever Evariste introduced a finger into the cage he scolded and pecked it; and as for the almost inaudible chuckle and cluck with which "L'Petit" greeted the insertion of a bunch of plumpy grass-seed, and of which he always delightedly partook, Evariste thought there was no sound so endearing, none to be compared with it.

As a man obliged to record his married life a failure, Evariste had hitherto only made the formal acquaintance of happiness, but since the arrival of "L'Petit," a peacefulness, content and satisfaction had sprung up within him that introduced him to a new existence. Therefore if Madame sat alone on the front steps now of an evening, or gossiped on a neighbor's, while Monsieur smoked his last pipefuls of the day in the garden in rear of the house, by the side of a bird-cage that dangled from the clothes-line, Madame neither commented upon it nor berated Monsieur—nor forgave the canary.

## A SONGLESS CANARY.

But the day came when all these things were swept as leaves from trees, that fall and float upon some dark and melancholy forest-pond.

### IV.

EVARISTE had ever been a particular man, but—accepting the bird as a gift from God—the sense in which he saw to the wants of “L’Petit,” from the first, was in every respect, a religious one; washing the perches, cleaning the cage, sprinkling sand in it, offering “L’Petit” his bath, and giving fresh seed and water, with the most devoted care and regularity. But, alas! many a bolt has fallen out of a clear sky and escape to freedom come to pass when the gaoler least expected it. The bottom fell from the cage one day, as completely as it sometimes does out of speculation.

Three hasps originally fastened the floor of “L’Petit’s” dwelling to the lower rim of it, and where one was now missing, a piece of white string supplied its place.

Now it so happened one fine morning that, as the cage hung in its accustomed location on the clothes-line by the porch, a tailless mother-sparrow and four fledglings—habitués of the vicinity and acquainted with easy gain—alighted on the bottom rim extending outside the cage—Evariste’s back being turned—and greedily commenced to filch what they could.

## A SONGLESS CANARY.

A white string was as a worm to one of the innocents, and a few tugs soon did away with the mistake—and the knot.

The sound of a falling object, and five noisy scurrying sparrows, caused Evariste to look around, but too late! A bottomless cage depended from the line, and “L’Petit” sat with the marauders on an adjacent fence, free as the day he came.

Evariste seldom swore, but the twirl of “*S-a-c-r-é!*” now in his mouth had an easy and familiar twist to it.

“Your apron—quick!” he demanded a moment later of his wife in the kitchen. “‘L’Petit’ is out of his cage! For the sake of God come out and help, or he is gone!”

But Madame was mute and stirred not, neither was there an answering look on her face; and Evariste, with perception sharpened of late, saw much where another would have seen little or nothing. Then, wordless in the scorn marking his glance, and with an angry light in his eyes, he turned on his heels and was gone.

“L’Petit?” *Bien!* There he was at the farthest end of the garden, a yellow dot on a high fence, beyond which lay the open fields—and absolute freedom.

Evariste breathed a prayer for the unlikely, whistled and called and coaxed, meanwhile cautiously approaching nearer, ne-ar-er, n-e-a-r-e-r, till, with a

N. B



"Your apron—quick!" he demanded . . . of his wife.—p. 148.



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sudden adroit movement, he clapped his wide-brimmed billy-cock hat on the spot where the bird perched ; but only the brim fell where the crown should, and “L’Petit” wriggled out from underneath and was gaily off.

Away he went, up and down, up and down, in the festooning flight of a canary ; but the wings of a bird in captivity are poor carriers for one let loose, and steadily declining towards the ground as he flew, exhaustion at last obliged “L’Petit” to alight on it. There, almost hidden under wild pea-vines and high coarse grass—too weak to move or resist—he was soon and tenderly secured by the huge brown hand of Evariste, and safely carried home again—a burden of yellow preciousness.

## V.

A BIRD twice caught is doubly dear, and the cage hung from its accustomed place on the clothes-line that evening, in the garden, with Evariste sitting and smoking beside it. And for the first time in the seven years of their married life, the husband shunned the wife ; whilst Madame Clavette—less two years the thirty-three of her husband—became at last conscious of the width of that gap which had slowly widened between them, even from the very day that saw the Curé unite them.

Evariste had always lit the fire and got his own

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breakfast, but when he awoke at the usual hour next morning to do it, he found this intention fore stalled, and his wife, for once, before him.

Immediately dressing and passing out to the kitchen, he further found—to his secret astonishment—that breakfast was not only ready but awaiting him, and with the air and silence and solitude of a man who sees nothing before him but his repast and the duties of the day, he sat down and partook of it.

It was a sleepless night that Madame Clavette had spent. But it was not the loss of a few hours' sleep, however, that made her appear so heavy-eyed, jaded and worn when morning broke, for thought can splinter the mind into more fragments than a blow shivers glass—and Madame had faced thoughts throughout the weary watches of that miserable night that were limited neither in number nor aggression.

She looked up wistfully, nay, timidly, as Evariste arose from the table and strode over to where his hat hung and then out of doors, but she lacked the power to stop him—all her former selfish daring, unthinking ways and heartless raillery now gone, transforming her in the presence of her husband this morning as one suddenly aloof, and bereft of what to do or say. Evariste might have seen these things had it pleased him, but it pleased him not; for never once looked he in the direction

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of his wife, whose silent misgiving he construed into an air of sullen defiance.

Fed and tended for the first time since its arrival by other hands than its master's, the bird that morning greeted Evariste's approach with a saucy note of recognition. But if Evariste smiled, he also frowned.

“Bah!” he muttered to the bird, “she might have let well-enough alone. What amends are these, ‘L’Petit’, compared with your loss? The devil does indeed lurk in the hearts of some women. God forgive her for the black trick she played us yesterday. She will have enough for next confession—*vraiment!*” and with a reflective shake of his head the speaker stalked off down the garden.

At the hour of noon a voice from the doorway called him to dinner, but if the weeder heard he made no response.

“Ev-ar-iste!” and surely there was a quaver in the voice this time—a round, smooth voice, too, when the owner liked.

This time she was answered; but the reply floated back in a far from encouraging tone:

“Well—what is it?”

“*Diner!*”

“I have no hunger,” brusquely. “The day is too hot for meat. If I want later I can eat apples,” and stooping down the speaker went on with his work.

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Madame plucked nervously at the bosom of her dress, and brushed the hair back from her forehead with a degree of uncertainty ; but she, so ready and bold of tongue heretofore, had not a word to say because of the lump in her throat. Softly creeping back into the house, she sat down—but not to eat. And there it stood for hours, the dinner she had taken such trouble with.

When at last the shadows began to lengthen, and the pipings of the birds outside to subside into the twitter of approaching even, Madame arose from the couch where she had thrown herself and lain as one without life, to bathe her flushed face in cool water and smooth out her dishevelled hair. This was followed by a particular brushing and tidying of her dress and person, after which, scrupulously neat in the appearance she presented, Madame Clavette left the house and tiptoed down the garden to where Evariste was known to be weeding the onions.

Some high dense bushes divided the garden, and concealed the halves of it from each other. As Madame drew near and was about to pass through the only and narrow gap, the low tones of a voice beyond told her that Evariste, working towards the house, was nearer than she expected ; and at once, in some dismay, she halted for a peep through the leafy barrier as to with whom it was he held conversation.

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But if the sound of a voice stopped her, and the sight that met her eyes—after some cautious difficulty—created wonder, the words that reached her robbed her of all save hearing; what she saw being Evariste seated on the ground, weeding, with the bird-cage beside him, and what she heard being the following, addressed to the latter's occupant :

“—eh, ‘L’ Petit’? Is it not so? Women are like onions—they provoke tears. But onions breed strength as well as tears, while a woman saps you of both. If I had my life to live over again, ‘L’ Petit,’ I would choose onions. A man who marries joy and finds sorrow weeps with dry eyes. I gave her of love first, ‘L’ Petit,’ and forbearance afterwards; but she beat both with a long tongue and coarse ways from the day when it was too late to turn back. She is pretty to look upon, and winning when I was not bound to her; but what is the first when your wife scorns the second? There is no child, ‘L’ Petit,’ to gloss things over for us; and ah me! I would I were able to drop from my life the full measure over again of the years we have lived together, if thus by shortening it I might live the rest of it once more free. There is no curse like to that which a shallow woman bestows.”

A sound as of a bird flying through the leaves caused Evariste to stop and look towards where his wretched wife had stood. When he turned his head away again, it was to find her standing beside him.

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“I have not much taste for food to-day,” he said, in a seriously quiet way, without betraying much surprise, thinking it was tea-time; adding, “The peach-apples are about ripe, and I won’t be in till dark.”

The other convulsively locked her hands together.

“Ah, *bon Dieu!*” now broke from her in the hard voice that hides. “Am I nothing to you but a meal-call? I come out to—to—” but she choked on the next word, and Evariste glanced up with a strange light in his dark eyes.

“Listeners never hear any good of themselves,” he at length observed, and then went on with his weeding.

“How much did you hear?” he presently asked, but without looking up.

“A houseful of what was not true,” and an unpleasant ring jumped into Madame’s tone.

Monsieur’s eyes flashed, but he made no reply.

“My ears had no choice but to hear,” the first defiantly continued, “and if they took that which they should not, how much more at fault are the lips that uttered to them.”

“And if,” said Evariste, getting up in his sternness to do it, “the lips that uttered were at fault, how much more to blame is the woman who makes possible the saying of such things. Seven years have we spent under yonder roof, you and I, as

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man and wife, but the best of my house to me now is the outside of it. The next winter comes all too fast, Madame Clavette, and I wish it well over."

The drawn face of the other had perceptibly lost in color.

" 'Madame'! 'Madame'! always 'Madame'!" she angrily and bitterly repeated ; "as if I had no other name. Have you forgotten the one you used to call me by? It was 'Babine' once ; but now you continually ice me with 'Madame.' Ah, Mother of God ! what have I not suffered !"

"Your sort would try to prove black white," said Evariste, pointedly, heatedly, and yet with some effort at self-control. "It is you, Madame Clavette, not I, who is responsible for that state of things here which in other houses drives men to villainy and desperation. You think of nothing, of nobody, but yourself. After you, I come. You are of the kind that would turn any paradise into a hell ; and you goad me to say it, Madame, that when you try to shift from your shoulders on to mine the beginning and the middle and the end—the whole cause, first and last—that has bred discord and this open clash now between us, then you say and do that which is UNTRUE and WRONG, Madame. I thought I had found me a wife in Babine Fournier, but 'twas surely Satan that whispered it. There is Antoine and his wife, Celeste—she would spoil him with affection, and I could

## A SONGLESS CANARY.

have had her for the asking against twenty such as he. But, no ; I took your laugh and her tears for her laugh and your tears now—and the black dog has followed me ever since. Your father is a just man, and bears with me. You shall go back. I can stand your ways, but not your tongue."

"No, no, Evariste ; not that!—oh, have pity on me!—do not send me back!" and with a great sobbing cry Babine was on her knees before him. But no one noticed that the cage she unwittingly overturned had liberated "L' Petit," who now hopped out and began picking on the ground. "I—I am n—not the s—same," Babine continued, with a bent head, and in the jerky fashion of extreme distress. "I—I am n—not the s—same w—woman to-day I—I was y—yesterday. I—I have ch—changed in a n—n—night. You had good cause to be bitter against m—me yesterday, for there w—was m—murder in my heart towards the b—bird, but as truly as there is a G—God ab—b—bove us am I n—now changed and become the B—Babine of old ag—g—ain. I wept tears all n—night and tried to blot out the p—past with them, but, *mon Dieu!* m—my thoughts so overwhelmed m—me that I t—took to trembling. Then with the morning I l—lit the f—fire for love of you ; I got breakfast for l—love of you ; and my heart throbbed to s—stifle me when you c—came into the kitchen ; but when y—you w—would not look at me, or say a w—word, I thought it would

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break. At dinner-time I would feast you, Evariste, with the things I got ready ; but when I called and called and you would not c—come I grew sick at the knowledge of it, and the meal I prepared five hours ago still stands untouched. Then I could carry my burden n—no longer, and came out into the g—garden to throw myself into your arms and to tell you that I would be a b—better woman ; but the worst was to come when you n—nailed my feet to the ground with what you s—said to ‘L’ Petit.’ Evariste—dear, dear Evariste—take me in your arms and kiss it all away, or my heart will yet break !” and it was the half—despairing movement the speaker now made that caused “L’ Petit” to wing a short upward spiral, and finally alight on the kneeler’s head. And there he stood, cocking his own head this way and that—Responsible Cause and Peacemaker in one.

Evariste beheld as in a dream, and heard as one afar off. The sun shone upon his hatless head, his bronzed neck and face, and the breeze toyed with his black locks ; but real as the scene was about him, it could not begin to compare with the reality of the one in which he was so immediately concerned.

If he hesitated, the sweet, imploring contrition of the bowed Babine might dissipate—and yet to claim his wife lost him the bird.

“ Babine,” he huskily said, after a fleet silence in

## A SONGLESS CANARY.

which his soul warred within him, "If you love me as you say, do not move—'L' Petit' has again escaped—he is on your head."

"If you love the bird more than you do me," a small brave voice unsteadily said, "I am content, and true to you on what is left."

Again was "L' Petit" disturbed, to alight this time on the shoulder of his master. There, after a momentary vain attempt to possess himself of the sunny strands of hair that lay within reach on the latter's coat, he next turned attention to himself, and having lightly and unconcernedly plumed and preened himself, and all without attracting the slightest notice, he at last spread his wings and once more turned rover.

## THE STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

A FACE of leather to the sparing build of a kneeling form, reducing to fragments a snow-clad toise of block stone. Such is Favard Lemieux at forty-five years, seven months and two days precisely, as he now emerges from the obscurity of his past into the celebrated present.

As to his life, Favard was content. There was always something to do, always something to keep him busy. The wayside weeds contrived for his support in the summer-time, with astonishing friendly growth and re-growth, that he, by municipal command, might scythe and sickle them without mercy as foes, hoe and shovel the ditches clean, mend and patch the road with the stones he was now breaking, bring sand as required, cart away mud and refuse as needed, attend to the culverts, keep the sidewalk in repair—in short, have an eye on everything pertaining to the nature of such labors, that those who paid toll might not have too much cause to grumble ; all of which he did, sometimes wisely, sometimes not very well.

## STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

With the arrival of winter the snow-plough had to be driven, paths kept passably clear for pedestrians, stone to be broken for the coming spring and summer, all of which paid duties were to be performed according as experience dictated ; apart from which he employed his spare time principally to rearing a wood-pile by the steps in the front of his house.

On this twenty-sixth day of February, therefore, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety-six, Favard plied his short stone hammer, that made the chips fly, with the manner of one averse to accomplishing more than what was merely requisite to spin out the day. His doffed mitts, laid to one side, made a wonderful sight. Undoubtedly huge, and originally of that stout and knitted make with which the fingers of the French-Canadian housewives are so familiar, they had passed through several processes of coarse darning till darning availed no further and facing with cloth was resorted to, after which, *in extremis*, ragged and wretched-looking, they suffered a last imposition on the palm in the shape of leather, and presented to the eye the final stage of inanimate things in demise that partook of the ludicrous. The clothes of their owner were the worse for wear, too—a good deal worse, but of quite a swaggering cast in contrast to the mitts—patched and mended, threadbare and faded, but serviceable, withal, in such weather and work.

## STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

From where the unsupervised Favard was thus engaged nothing met his eyes but the road running immediately by him, and the mountain two hundred yards straight away on the other side of it. To his rear lay the Roman Catholic cemetery, whitely mailed in a coat of polished snow, that, thus affected by recent changes in the weather, now glistened—somewhat painfully, it may be said—in the light of the afternoon sun; while some six feet away, a young elm—one of a row of several—looked with bare and chilly aspect down upon the stone-breaker's back, to the trunk of the former of which a placard at one time had been affixed, giving notice of a meeting now long out of date. But the winds came, and the rains came, and the snows came, and so in due course it also came that nothing was left of the paper and its rough, hand-printed inscription but a top portion, on which in French, still plainly visible—that the eyes of those who run might read—was to be seen the preluding word, “To-night.”

Now, so far as reading goes, it was all one and the same thing with Favard as to whether he ran or stood still; and although he had once incidentally remarked the paper, it was but paper to him and nothing more.

And so he went on with his work in his customary meek and humble-minded way, giving no thought to the morrow, or what became of the

## STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

day gone ; jogging from one to the other with the same simple, trusting faith which had ever characterized him. Shocks of a seismic quality might jar the mental world ; science discover new elements, new processes, new combinations ; geology at last stumble upon traces of man in the great Miocene period ; or the theory of evolution receive its final and crushing blow ; but so long as Favard had a pipeful of strong-smelling native tobacco for the smoking, pea-soup, pork and beans, blood-sausage, and fish on Friday, for the eating, very little short of this planet in terrestrial collision would face him with the fact that anything outside the pale of his own existence was worth a moment's meditation. What was there to take precedence of his appetite for blanched corn ? *Rien !* Let the world, then, take its course. Favard was mindful of his own affairs, and wanted nothing better than a whiff of *tabac quesnel* and the few *piastres* coming to him at the end of each week—things that quite satisfied him if the march of empires would but keep out of his way. Not that he would put himself forward, and call a halt ; but simply that, as a man of sterling lowliness, his little daily round of life in a vale of snug peacefulness fully fed all the asking of his ambition. And yet these are the men that fought at Châteauguay, and St. Eustache.

Favard had just commenced on a fresh piece of rock, when the fall of a human shadow caused him to look up.

## STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

The new-comer was a man about his own age, inclined to be stout, a trifle stooped, and with a radii of wrinkles around each eye on a plain clean-shaven face. This person wore felt stockings and rubbers, homespun trousers, a faded brown-green coat, a short, common red sash, and a shabby black cloth cap. Over his right arm hung an empty sack, while with the hand of the other he drew a red and rudely-made sled.

“*Bon jour!*” said he, stolidly, as Favard met his gaze.

“*Bon jour?*” replied Favard, inquiringly, sitting well back on his heels.

“Yours is no light task,” commented the first.

“It all depends,” and Favard mildly shrugged his shoulders, “whether you work or look on. Sometimes when I see a man ploughing I tell myself, ‘That is hard work,’ and go my way. And sometimes when a man that ploughs goes by me he will loudly say, ‘Ah, Favard, your bread is well earned!’ and then I try to think what it all means. But it is a puzzle to me yet.”

The other drew the back of his mitt twice over his moustache, first one way and then the other, and as he did so the paper on the elm caught his eye.

“To-night!” he muttered.

“To-night?” repeated Favard. “What about to-night?”

“*Rien*—nothing! But does not your back ache and your knees stiffen in such an occupation?”

## STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

“Little or nothing,” answered Favard. “I ask François, who carries bricks and mortar up a ladder all day, if his legs are not tired, and he shrugs his shoulders and says, ‘Little or nothing.’ *Ma foi!* if I had the doing of it mine would fold up like a knife after the second mount.”

“And if I,” remarked the other, “did as you do for the length of a day, I could not rise without falling, and as for walking, *batême!* it would be like on wooden legs.”

The kneeler leaned with one hand on the hammer, and with the other pushed back his peaked cap.

“It is impossible to make it out,” he said, now scratching his head. “How do you occupy yourself, my friend?”

“I trudge it for the priests’ college. There is always something to be taken to one place and fetched from another. My feet are ever moving, and in the course of a day I cover many miles.”

“*Ma foi!* And do your feet never grow weary?”

“Little or nothing,” and for a second time, encountering the sign by glance, he muttered—“To-night!”

“To-night?” queried Favard. “What about to-night?”

“*Rien*—nothing! but I must be going. Good-night! *baptiste!* I mean ‘good-day!’” and as he moved off he muttered to himself—“To-night!”

## STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

“To-night?” repeated Favard, as he resumed his hammering. “The fellow must have ‘to-night!’ on the brain to say ‘Good-night!’ in the broad of day.”

The stone-breaker had no lack of passing company. All day long, from early morn till night fell, a steady stream of horses and sleighs, *habitants* and *bourgeoises*, farm-hands and city folks, drove continually by him. All day long the procession went on: teams upon teams of hardy, plodding horses, drawing blue box-sleighs loaded with sack-covered manure, that were driven by as brawny a set of yokels as ever the sun shone on—a class that held the road almost exclusively to themselves in the morning, and most incongruously mixed with the dashing pairs of spirited animals, attached to the luxuriously-appointed, fur-equipped sleighs of fair patricians, in the afternoon. But the way around the mountain is long, the vehicles apart and well strung out, and if, collectively, fashion and farming thus appear to rub acquaintance in a rather compromising manner, it happens that realities are sometimes the opposite, as in this instance, to what may be suggested to or pictured by the imagination. In this highly curious blend, therefore, *habitants* and yokels, M. le gentleman and M. le tradesman, grand dames and plebeian, Ma’m’selle the humble, plump and rosy-cheeked, and Mademoiselle the proud, arist-

## STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

eratically slender and dainty of tint, can be seen on any fine frosty afternoon in winter, carried on runners over the Côte des Neiges road, swinging by with snatch of song or mute lips and drinking eyes, to the musical rhythm of many bells, tiny and large, tuneful and noisy—a scene ever changing but ever the same, where French and English, mingling together, contribute towards a fusion of contrasts, daily enacted during mid-winter around the base of old Mount Royal, not easily duplicated in the world.

Such was the *personnel* of a procession with which Favard Lemieux was inconsequently familiar, gliding past him in all degrees of pace and purpose; and if at any one time he raised his head to see who it was that was just then going by, all the royalty and nobility of every nation on earth might be represented in the passing, and yet find Favard ever the same Favard, in the placid solemnity with which he pulled on his pipe, or afterwards plied the hammer.

Now it so happened that a jovial bumpkin, driving a double box-sleigh and a pair of shaggy Canadian ponies, was on his way home from the city, and, having introduced his volatile spirits to another of spirits equally volatile, trolled and hummed and whistled in turn as he drove leisurely along, and attested to his enjoyment in various harmless ways.





"Just before sundown . . . a *habitant* . . . reined his horse to a halt . . . in front of Favard"—p. 167.

## STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

Arrived opposite the busy Favard, his roving eye caught sight of the elm-held scrap of paper, and he slowed up.

“Well!” he vociferated, “what about ‘To-night?’?”

“To-night?” parroted Favard, coming to a dead stop. “What do you mean ‘What about to-night?’?”

“*Rien!*—nothing!”

“Then why do you ask?”

“Because you invite me. Ho, ho! Go pound your head with the hammer you have. Ha, ha, ha!” (then to the horses) “*Marche-donc! s-a-c-r-é!*” and waving his hand in an exaggerated form of leave-taking, he was soon out of sight.

After perplexedly scratching his head, Favard now shook it.

“There is surely some bewitchment about ‘To-night!’” soliloquized he; and then went on with his work, nothing the wiser for what his thoughts gave him.

Just before sundown, as the day wore on, a *habitant*, sitting in a box-sleigh with but his head showing above the sides of it, and who drove at a dog-trot, reined his horse to a halt with a shout and a jerk immediately in front of Favard.

“*B'jour, m'sieu!* Will you give me a match, if you please?”

“Willingly!” and Favard handed him several.

“*Merci bien!*” and it was just then the recipient

## STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

saw the sign on the tree. "To-night!" he muttered, as he now struck one of the matches on the bowl of his pipe.

"To-night?" repeated Favard, amazedly. "What about to-night?"

"*Rien*—nothing! But 'To-night' is doubtless important for you," and off he drove.

Favard was mystified. He drew a new block into position, and the strokes that pounded it to pieces seemed to ring out as many separate "To-nights!" Then he got up—the sun being down—and, carrying his mitts and the folded piece of sacking on which he had knelt in one hand, and the hammer in the other, betook himself homewards.

"Wife," said he, as he entered the house, "what about to-night?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" staring; "no more than any other night."

"Not so," he persisted; "something is to happen to-night."

"*Vierge!*" incredulously, "what makes you think so?"

"Three times to-day," said Favard, with a troubled air, seating himself and gazing at his large horny hands, "have I had 'To-night' thrown in my face, and each time that I asked, 'What about to-night?' the reply was the same: '*Rien*—nothing!' but may the blessed Virgin forever hide her face from us if there was not something behind it all.

## STONE-BREAKER OF COTE DES NEIGES.

They all parted from me with the word on their lips, and I but invite dizziness to myself to search for a meaning that fits. The word is now swimming round in my head like a pea in soup, and my brain is weary with the exercise of it. Between that and hunger I soon will have sickness of the head if one or the other is not quickly satisfied."

"Come, then," said the practical other, "and eat;" and bustling about, the frugal meal she was preparing before the entrance of her husband was soon ready. "Forget your worry, *bonhomme*. These *canaille* have but plagued you for an innocent. *Regardez!* I have bought some smelts for you this evening. Eat, and the foolishness will depart."

Favard had finished his tea, and sat in a corner of the kitchen by the stove, deep in thought as he smoked while his wife washed the dishes. All at once he removed his pipe and slapped his thigh mightily.

"*Femme*," cried he, exultantly, with a sudden light on his brown, wrinkled face, "I have it—the thing is at last upon me! Why is it that we contemplate the toil of another, and so often exclaim: 'Yours is no light task, my friend! '? The reason is at last plain—*le bon Dieu* has given me the truth! It is because the labor of another, to which we are unused, looks hard that we might be content with our own. I have long struggled for an answer that comes TO-NIGHT!"

## A FLOWER FROM THE FORGE.

### I.

ON a bend in the road east of the village stood the smithy—a gaunt wooden building of two stories, that, wholly by itself, pleased neither the eye nor the place. For the spot it affronted with its ugliness, its white-plastered cracks, and its weather-grey and grimy look, was one in which the feet of a stranger might pardonably lag ; many an old elm and maple meeting high overhead in panoply to a soft-shrubbed country road, that wound through a scene of quiet beauty.

During each year's months of foliage the smithy was always in shadow beneath the trees. In the upper half lived the blacksmith, with his wife and children ; in the lower half he toiled to maintain them. By one of the two street corners of the house, a few feet in from the sidewalk, a faded red and white stage-coach, ousted from service by the advent of a railway, mouldered on its axles, where—lost to all sense of past dignity, and amid the jostle of tall weeds—it fed on thoughts of its youth. The final blow to pride was given by a heap of coal, which, as dumped,

## A FLOWER FROM THE FORGE.

blocked and profaned the end that passengers once bustled in and out of; a small black cutter-sleigh behind, with raised shafts and a clean, lean-bodied look, sharply taking the bus to task for its aldermanic proportions.

Against the front of the building rested some rusting tires and wagon-springs, a bundle of bar and rod iron, a short ladder and an axle-jack. Between the two high, wide double doors a movable working-bench volunteered the impression of a young pyramid wanting its apex half; and a few yards east of the house, beside a creek and under a wide-branched maple, stood a grindstone. A dingy white mortar-trough kept this company; while the circular platform—like to the wheel of an ancient ox-cart—on which the blacksmith did his tiring, held aloof from both with a cold gaze upwards, professing small pain in the fact that its central and only eye was pierced by the projecting iron pin that kept the wheel in position. Here, also, against the smithy corner, a rough-and-ready affair of boards had been erected, wherein—with a diminutive box-forgo, and some greasy black machines that suggested the composite of clothes-wringers and spinning-wheels—certain kinds of work were occasionally done. A balcony overhung each door, enclosing two windows apiece, underneath one of which the sign was displayed—

P. LABOUCHE,

FORGERON.

## A FLOWER FROM THE FORGE.

—the work of some untutored genius, perhaps the blacksmith himself, who made an earnest attempt to prance a steed on one side and to depict a meek top-buggy on the other ; the whole inscribed within the extravagant flourish of a scrolled border. Three feet above ran a row of four windows ; two protected against flies by green muslin, and two against the sunlight—as permitted by the trees—by a pair of Venetian blinds. Above these again, the same number of attic windows broke through a mansard roof for a contemplation of the visible. Such, then, was the house and workshop of Paul Labouche, a hard-working, well-meaning man who took life somewhat seriously.

Throughout the length of each working day he heated iron and hammered it. To the song of his anvil was born the fly of sparks, red by day and fiery in the evening. When Paul worked at night a single hand-lamp served his purpose. But the flame told little through its smoked chimney—albeit the blacksmith found no fault with it—and it is on one of these occasions that we come upon Deneige, Labouche's eldest daughter.

The stilly warmth of this midsummer's night presaged a storm ; and all that answered the barking of the village dogs was the long tremolo of an owl. Paul Labouche was working late again, and from simply regarding him—with nothing else to do—Deneige held the lamp and moved as

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required with it. In age she looked eighteen instead of twenty-three; and as to face and figure, one seldom stops to criticise the beauty of a flower unfolding amid rubbish—admiration is too genuine. To mark the fair skin and soft lines of pretty Deneige, therefore, offset by the smuttied person of her father, is a contrast in which any woman would gain; but to add the slumbering glow of a forge fire and the sooty light of a kerosene lamp, that together barely held the inquisitive sneaking of gloom and shadows at bay, begot in a place of big bellows, vises, wrenches, sledge-hammers and tongs, littered with scrap-iron, and sanded underfoot with iron particles—iron, nothing but iron, and all unnatural-looking in the darkness—raised Deneige to the degree of an angel.

Here a limping, slouching man of about forty entered, but as Deneige had her back to the door, and the blacksmith was busy at the moment tapping a whiffletree-band, both failed to notice him until Paul raised for his nippers.

“Hello, Eloi,” bantered the latter, thrusting into the fire and beginning to blow; “come to help?”

The butt of the village tongued his cheek, and smiled weakly. “I had a good supper,” he stuttered, after a sidelong glance at Deneige.

The blacksmith left off blowing to relight his pipe.

“You had a good supper, had you?” he now

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commented between puffs, and commencing on the bellows again. "Well, it is not everyone can say that. And what was so good that you should speak of it?"

Deneige put the lamp down, and Eloi's look shifted from her to her father. Then gravely fan-spreading his hands, he said, "I saw three men to-night."

After which he again wandered in glance, with an air of confiding, if vapid, assurance.

The blacksmith was ready with a laugh, leaving his straight-faced daughter to remark, "You were doubly in luck then, Eloi—your meal and three men had surely to do with one another. Tell us how it was?"

Eloi's roving gaze came back out of the hemming darkness, and for an instant settled on Deneige. Then withdrawing it to watch the flame the blacksmith blew, he sat down on an inverted nail-keg, heaved a sigh, and thus soliloquized :

"Bread and lard, bread and lard—the best lard I ever tasted. I had an egg. It fell on the floor, and broke. A broken egg—who will have it? No one. Then throw it away. No; save it. The floor is clean—the floor is white; so on a clean white plate I gathered it. There was no fire, so I did without it. A clean white plate, a yellow yolk, and white of an egg surrounding. I took bread and crumpled it; I took salt and sprinkled it; I

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took a spoon and ate of it. When I had finished I was thankful for it—the times are few that I remember a better dish."

The blacksmith smoked away with another laugh, and carried the now glowing iron from the forge to the anvil.

"Well," interrogated Deneige, taking up the lamp again as her father began hammering, "that is not all—what about the men you saw? They surely were strangers, or you would not speak of them."

Eloi transferred his ever-restless gaze from the fire to the shower of sparks about the anvil. Then, as if still addressing himself more than the others, he, in the same monotoning key, continued :

"I had a candle, and it burnt out. I have other candles, but I will light no more to-night. The house was haunted with its darkness, so I left it. Outside the leaves talked in their sleep, the stars were half-shut eyes; moon there was none, and the big shadows whispered evil with the little ones. Darkness was everywhere, in the house and out of it. I am not afraid of it, but something came to disturb me—something I could not name. My feet felt their way along the road for me in a pair of 'boeufs' that laid them down like wool. Far ahead the blackness was bitten into by a faint light. Paul Labouche was at work again in his smithy then—perhaps alone, as he sometimes is. Thither I would go. The prospect cheered, for how much the others

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may twit me, Paul has his limits. All is silent ; it is the hour of the evening meal, and everybody indoors. Then all at once there comes a knock out of the night. I know it for the rapper on my own door, and stop. We all visit one another by the back way ; who, then, summons me to my front door at this hour ? I will see. I go back—I use caution—I arrive opposite—I am unseen—I wait and listen. By and by another knock, a gentle one meant for me alone—the call of one who wishes not to inform the neighbors. They try the door, but find it locked. I am wary—I do not yet go over—while I can see no one, I feel wrong is intended me. A-ah ! the back door—it is unfastened—suppose they go around. But theirs is not the manner of thieves, and so I wait. Now they talk among themselves ; two—yes ; three—yes ; four—no. Then three it is. I ask myself, Name three persons, Eloi, most likely to have business together with you at this hour ? I cannot. Then I consider : I am alone—I have no relations, no enemies—who, then, would come to me at this time in such a way ? Again I am without satisfaction. Once more they talk low between themselves—two voices coarse and one fine. Then they come down the steps—I become part of a tree—they pass out of the gate—they hesitate, and exchange tones before it—then they go down the road. I peer hard—I count three—I am about to follow. Then I change my

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mind—I turn around—I come up. But Eloi Yell has not done with these men yet, Paul Labouche—he feels that in his bones."

Paul had ceased hammering, the glow had died from the iron, and dropping the latter into a pail of water, the blacksmith hipped his arms, and said :

" You should have followed, Eloi, and seen them out of the village."

" They may have only required directions," suggested Deneige, standing the lamp on the anvil, " and applied at the first place they came to."

" Save that of Paul Labouche, my house is the last in the village this way," returned Eloi Yell, without raising his eyes, and still as if speaking to himself. " I did not meet them—they must have come up behind me through the village—why, then, pass so many houses for mine?"

" Because," said Deneige, quickly, " they only be-thought themselves, perhaps, in front of yours. Then finding nobody in, they turn back for what-ever it is they want."

" My ears are good," continued Eloi Yell to himself, as if dissatisfied with the answer ; " I strive to hear what they say, and catch nothing but ' Eloi Yell,' ' Eloi Yell,' in an undertone, twice."

The blacksmith stood for a moment scratching his head. Then fishing out of the water the metal he had flung into it, he examined it, and next laid it down on the anvil beside the lamp.

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“Eloi,” he joked, now looking around for the whiffletree, “go home and go to bed. You said you had a good tea, and that your candle went out. *Bon!* Then you fell asleep, softy, and wakened out of it to come and tell us of a dream. You are over forty, Eloi, but I suppose you will always have curious things to relate till the end. Eh, you lame rascal, could anything be truer?”

The effect upon Eloi was not altogether surprising. He had been known to weep before, but the occasions were out of the common, and to shed tears now seemed ridiculous. This was the way the blacksmith looked at it; and the twinkle in his eye ran into a smile, and the smile into a laugh, before he was aware of it. Then, slightly ashamed, he stopped, and tried to appear serious; Deneige meanwhile patting on the head a man twice her age, and comforting him as she would a child.

“There, there, Eloi, you foolish fellow—leave off and smile instead—we did not mean to hurt your feelings. You imagine too much, you do indeed; you see, hear, and feel things that nobody else does. And knowing that my father did but jest with you, this behavior of yours would almost persuade me that your three men, after all, did come to you in a dream.”

This was too much for Eloi, who jumped up, drew a sleeve across his eyes, and angrily stammered:

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“I d-did not dream! I d-did see three men!  
I d-did hear ‘Eloi Yell’ spoken!”

Slightly disconcerted at this, Deneige drew back; and from her Eloi frowned to her father, and from him back to the first again, as though mortally offended. Then in a nettled way the blacksmith said :

“*Batême!* Eloi, but you are in a humor to-night. And you should know better than to weep and snarl at Paul Labouche for nothing. What is it to us whether you dreamt of or saw three men or thirty?”

But Eloi’s sudden vehemence had spent itself; the shine died out of his eyes, and all his former abjectedness came back.

“I may have dreamt it,” he apathetically began, looking from one to the other with a lack-lustre expression; “I may not have”—then he stopped, perceptibly straightened, and took on the attitude of a sharp-hearing man, caught by an outside sound.

Paul and Deneige were both constrained to listen also, but do this intently as they might and did, nothing unusual greeted their ears. And as they wondered, Eloi next added to it by sloughing his stupidity a second time, and softly stepping to the door. For a moment he paused there—a rigid, listening attenuated figure, hung with ill-fitting clothes, and finished off with mop hair and a

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faded thing of soft felt—the only headwear its owner possessed. Then, without looking around, Eloi Yell went as he came, and disappeared into the outer darkness.

Deneige looked at her father, who whistled a bar for them both. But before either could speak, the gloom without built up three men in the doorway.

### II.

AT the sight of them Deneige involuntarily moved a step nearer to her father. Eloi vanishes and three strangers succeed him. The effect, in a manner, was disquieting. Eloi had not dreamed after all, then, for these surely were the very men of whom he had spoken. Taken collectively, the impression made upon Deneige was an uneasy one; a sensation she must have communicated to her father, whose heavy-grained nature was not altogether proof against the same fibrous feeling.

A rather young and slim-built individual, who dressed with care and attention to detail, seemed to be the man of the three, but of all follies is that of trusting to appearances. A person of birth and education he seemed, whose small oval face was completed with the uptwist of a slender moustache; characteristics his two companions heightened by ill-concealed signs of an uninviting blend of personal qualities.

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“You are Paul Labouche, the blacksmith, are you not?” inquired the well-dressed member of the three.

“The same,” Paul removed his pipe to say. “What can I do for you?”

The other refreshed himself with a second look at Deneige, and then sauntered in for a seat on the keg Eloi Yell had vacated.

“You are acquainted with one Eloi Yell, I fancy?”

The blacksmith nodded, and Deneige crept another step closer to him.

“Well, he is in demand at present, and we want him or his whereabouts. How far can you oblige us?”

Paul blinked—there was that about the man that jarred upon him, an exception both pronounced and immediate. “No further than the smithy,” he lowered his eyebrows to say.

“You take a short cut with your answer,” his questioner shrugged; “but we will pass it, and relieve you of even that courtesy,” and with formal politeness he possessed himself of the lamp from Deneige. “Time presses,” he continued, raising this to look about him, “and while your place may be small enough by day, it is a deceitfully large one in the dark. A man could try on many shapes and fool sight in this gloom—eh, Monsieur Labouche?”

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The blacksmith again blinked. He had little to boast of in the way of rare experiences, and the present was easily among the foremost. First that half-idiot Eloi Yell, babbling what they had taken for granted as the latest whim of an unbalanced mind ; and now the remarkable evidence offering itself that he was not quite the fool they had mistaken him for. In a puzzle over the matter, the stranger's insinuations were lost on him. But the finer instincts of his daughter were less at fault, and as the stranger ceased, veneering his sarcasm with a thin smile, the dislike she took to him from the first grew, at this point, into actual resentment.

“The idea is absurd, sir,” she challenged. “Why should we harbor Eloi Yell?—he has committed no crime ; he has no enemies. Why seek him here, therefore, and suspect us ?”

The stranger parted with another thin smile, and turned to the two in the doorway. “Search the place,” he ordered, holding out the lamp to the first that took it. Then resuming with Deneige, he continued :

“ You have said nothing about friends, Mademoiselle. Are a man’s enemies the only ones that inquire for him ?”

The irony in these words put Deneige on the defensive.

“ You are again mistaken, sir,” she replied, and with more spirit. “ I did not say you were his enemies.”

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The stranger shrugged, and for a moment regarded the movements of his companions. Then turning to Deneige, he filled in the time to remark : “Your words involve us, Mademoiselle. You avoid agreeable mention, and take pains to deny a gambolling charge. If we have said anything to displease you we withdraw it. We are here in a matter of some importance, after one Eloi Yell, a foolish fellow. We disturb you at your tasks, for which we apologize ; and you disturb us without compunction in our mind, and for which you tender no regrets. Now then, pretty one, dissolve our doubts : we are here after Eloi Yell ; again, what say you ?”

“This,” firmly and unexpectedly, “that it is in no good cause.”

The stranger pursed his lips and favored Deneige with a stare.

“Excellent !” he now commented, still staring ; “excellent ! You have wit as well as looks. And for the sake of argument, Mademoiselle, suppose we are after him in the way you mention—”

“We should withhold him from you.”

“A fool ?”

“Yes ; a fool.”

The stranger laughed, and then lifted his hat.

“Truly, Mademoiselle,” and the essence of the mocking air in his manner now crept into the compliment also, “you are one in ten thousand.

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Who thought to chance upon the charm and spirit of your person in this place? Our fortunes are of a—”

“Come now! come now!” warned the blacksmith, seizing a bar of iron; “I’ve had enough of this prying and poking and brazen effrontery. Get out! Whose shop is this that you should take possession of it, hindering me in my work and making free with my daughter? *Sacré!* no man would put up with it, had he twice my patience.”

“Our ways may vex you a trifle,” was the unruffled reply, “but if you happen to have Eloi Yell about you, please hand him over—the loan would prove very acceptable to us.”

“If Eloi Yell is all you want,” angrily, “go and look for him. I tell you he is not here.”

“And if he was,” supplemented Deneige, with the same sudden and unexpected spirit, “I would not trust him to you.”

“The fellow must have waylaid your heart, lout as he is said to be,” was the cool and sardonic rejoinder. “Women have queer fancies, at times, in the men they pick upon.”

Deneige answered him with a look, but her father lifted his bar. “Another word from you,” he threatened, “reflecting upon my daughter, and I’ll lock it back in the mouth it belongs to with this.”

“Put down your rod, Monsieur,” was the unmoved reply. “One cannot always offer Heaven



"'Come now, come now!' warned the blacksmith"—p. 184.



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such a weight without resting. You make a good father, but a very poor diplomat. You take us too seriously. The drawback to speech is that a word has too many meanings. The true interpretation of language, therefore, lies as much with the hearer as the speaker, and as much with inflection as in expression. Let us part amicably."

"*Bon!*" grimly assented the blacksmith, lowering his weapon. "And the sooner the better."

"And you can furnish us with no information of Eloi Yell?"

"None whatever."

"He was here to-night?"

"Yes, he was here to-night."

"How long ago?"

Here Deneige interposed. "Eloi may be soft-minded," she hurried to say instead, "but that is no reason why we should oblige you in this fashion behind his back. If you are so anxious to see him, Monsieur, you have only to convince my father or me, apart or together, of the necessity urging you, and it may be that we are only too willing to help you. But to search for him as you are now doing, Monsieur, is a waste of time—of that I am well assured."

"Poh!" the tone was new, and the light in the eyes livelier. "You are admitting more than you should. But it is so with most women—the tongue undoes them. You have displayed several quali-

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ties, Mademoiselle, in the few minutes that have permitted us to you, which, added to your face and figure, make up one of the majesties. And instead of that skipping buffoon, Eloi Yell, I shall present Mademoiselle, the blacksmith's daughter. She shall answer superbly."

The speaker ended in a higher key than he began on, and finished with a fillip of his fingers. In vague alarm Deneige retraced the steps she had taken from her father's side in championing the cause of Eloi Yell ; and sniffing malevolence in the words he had just heard, the blacksmith whipped thought, leaned upon his iron, and eyed the speaker with a glance of rekindling anger.

" May my soul smoke in the hereafter," he at length said, " if I can make out you or your words. If you are ready to go, why don't you ? and if you wait for anything, what is it ? "

Then, to the great amazement of both father and daughter, the stranger, from his previous good behavior, began the antics of one well on in drink, capering and dancing with a jig-step and overhead fling of his arms, and repeating the while in a maudlin way—

" Losing one, we try another,  
Take the daughter—leave the mother ;  
Two to him, and trust to me  
What next follows—one, two, three—*Now !*"

To the loud call of the last word a blinding flash and a peal of thunder answered, the lamp went out

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in the smithy, and the blacksmith himself was jerked down and backwards to the floor in the clasp of four strong arms. In time with this, Deneige struggled in a strange embrace, with a hand clasped over her mouth. The stratagem had succeeded ; lured into temporary forgetfulness of the others, this was the result.

“Hold him, one of you,” cried the stranger to his associates. “The handcuffs are in my right pocket. Dash his shouting!—can’t you stop it?”

“No more than we can the thunder,” one answered. “But as long as both last together, no one can hear.”

“Then tie his mouth as soon as you get the cuffs on,” directed the first. “As for the girl, I can manage her until you are free of the father. Hurry—we should be off—’twill pour when it does rain, or I’m mistaken.” Here Deneige caused him trouble for a moment, after which he continued, speaking now to her father: “Make less noise, Labouche, and listen to reason. I swear to you by the Crucifix that no harm is intended your daughter. But it is high time we were on the return with Eloi Yell, and this is the only recourse we have for your quick consent to replace him with your daughter. We shall not detain her an instant longer than necessary—a few hours at the most; and when she comes back to you again, it will be the same person in every respect. On my

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my honor, believe me—by the blessed Virgin do I cross myself—that she shall be well properly treated!"

Two minutes later Paul Labouche, manacled, strapped of foot, and silenced with his own hand-kerchief, lay alone in the smithy on his back.

### III.

ONE remove from the river front of Montreal, by a long, low, shambling market,\* a two and a half century old church,† and two blocks of limestone buildings that flank both the former, and look their age of a hundred years or more, lies the eastern extremity of St. Paul Street.

Dirty at all times, narrow and cobblestoned, the market imparts to it by day a commercial state of respectability that night never fails to replace with a fagged-out, slinking air, occasionally heightened by the invasion of river mist.

When the transactions of the day are over, therefore, and the *habitants* return home, the first men off duty from the ships begin to appear, until by the time night has fairly darkened in, the rolling gait and select numbers of a seafaring class turn the place into one of a port resort for tipplers.

The few street lamps of the bracket period that still remain thaw into the fallen shades of night

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\* Bonsecours Market.      † Bonsecours Church.

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with a half-torpid flame ; and by way of partial support, perhaps, a gleam here and there from some shop door or window eats outward with a conveyed impression of insecurity.

The great dilapidated market was closed and deserted, and the few foot-falls it re-echoed came from the other side of the street. Suspended over the door of a corner saloon, an illuminated and flashily begemmed glass barrel served as a beacon to the trudging mariner, while trade was further catered to with the strains of a scratch orchestra and the sign in the window "*Soupe Gratis.*" In a dark doorway, dark enough to conceal them, two women quarrelled hoarsely ; just beyond whom a pawnshop—in addition to the nondescript character of the articles shown therein by the aid of an oil lamp, that did its duty dimly through the unwashed windows—displayed, even this late, a suit of oil-skins and a pair of sea-boots in a hooped overhead dangle in front of the door. A frowzy haberdasher's, almost opposite, dressed its windows exclusively with several strung lines of coarse grey socks ; and of the two or three grocery stores that divided musty honors between them, one devoted its narrow, dingy window to the tilt of two opened cases of cheap straw-packed liquor. Indeed, the smell of spirits might almost be said to exhale from every passing breath, until it seemed the chief component of the street's peculiar atmosphere. A little

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farther on a confectionery store—mostly store—appealed to the sight as about the only redeeming feature in a sour neighborhood. But even here a moodiness seemed to sit upon the scanty stock ; and from the window-shown jars of stick-candy and peppermint drops, to the sodden, pink-iced squares of ginger-bread, and the stale buns that retreated under a newspaper for very staleness, the timid cringing of a poor relation equally addressed itself to the imagination.

Near the eastern and blacker end of the street, a series of area-railings fenced off some basement eating-houses, that, for the most part, subsisted on the day patronage of the market-folk. The single covered rig rattling up the street, wet from a recent downpour, now stopped in front of one of these, and four figures, quickly alighting therefrom, hurried across the uneven flagstones, down the precipitous stone steps, and in through the bell-ring-ing door. Of the two long and red-benched tables on either side of the room thus entered into, one was draped with a red-flowered table-cloth and ready-laid ; the reversed plates being a thick delf, the knives and forks of a black wooden-handled order, and the table divided down its middle by a line of balloon fly-traps, cruet-stands, catsup bottles, salt-cellars, call-bells and dishes of butter. At intervals, in low glass dishes, some watery preserves cog-itated ; the whole being completed with a few plates

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of soda-biscuits, and cornucopias of red-fringed napkins in the tumblers. The dishes on the other table were crowded to one end of it under muslin, and the cloth folded up to them revealed a thin glossy oil-cloth beneath. At the other end of this same table a small group of men smoked over a game of checkers; the proprietor, Louis Beauchamp, also smoking near them, with his coat off, in a diminutive rocking chair. A small ornamental stove, six or eight healthy geraniums, and a collection of "high art" calendars and advertisements—chiefly of tobacco firms—that embellished the walls—including the large swinging-lamp that depended from the centre of the ceiling—contributed the final in effect towards a picture of orderly, if humble, cosiness.

Behind the door, in rear of Louis Beauchamp's rocker, was another room, furnished with far less pretensions than the first, but occupied by the quintette with whom we have to do.

## IV.

AT the sight of his visitors—three men and a woman—Louis removed his pipe and arose to shove his chair to one side and back up against the door in his immediate rear. In odd contrast to such unusual behavior, which, strangely enough, they never noticed, the rest of the room's settled

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occupants simply looked up and down and went on watching the game again, affording—neither player having turned a head—quick proof of the hold this form of recreation has upon French-Canadian interest. For, although a thunder-storm had passed over the city an hour previous, more than that would have to account for the heavy veiling and shawling of a woman on a rather oppressive summer night; but as Louis served meals at all hours up to midnight, no one doubted that the new-comers had dropped in to dine there; and so from them the glances went back to the game again, leaving Louis to deal with his supposed customers unremarked by the slightest curiosity.

Halting in front of Louis, the slightest man of the three made a sign on the floor with his foot, spanned the buttons on his coat twice, and then drew a hand crossways over the same—all in an instant.

The guardian of the door shook his head.

“I can pass you, but not the woman,” he bent to whisper.

“Go in and tell ‘The Angel,’ ” was the low answer, “that we have brought her better than she sent us for.”

The other hesitated. Then producing a key, he unlocked and opened the door, and, shutting it, was quickly gone.

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During his absence the last speaker, Regis Doré, turned to watch the players, whom—half the room separating them—he found fully intent on their game. Again the door opened and shut, and once more Louis stood before them.

“You go in at your own risk,” he breathed in Doré’s ear. “There’s no small row on over it. ‘The Angel’ is against bringing her in,” indicating the woman by glance, “but the others are not so strict—rather than have their long wait go for nothing, they are quite willing. Perhaps you had better go in first and explain.”

“Never,” promptly, and in the same low key. “If Madame Brabant” (sometimes known as “The Angel”) “cannot trust herself to my discretion in the matter, she can fix on someone else to do her pleasure after this. We go in together or not at all.”

“As you say,” shrugged Louis. “The door is at your service. But take my word for it—your reception is a warm one.”

“Madame may object,” Doré significantly replied, “but she does not prevent me,” and with a motion of his head to the others to follow, he passed in with them.

As the door closed Louis relocked it, returned the key to a pocket, and then sat down to his pipe again, scanning the window as he did so.

At the end of a short, small and ill-lit hall, Regis

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Doré knocked on the top and bottom of a door, and next gave the knob a double turn, twice. Before these were given it was evident to the ears of his party that the repressed tones now reaching them were in altercation ; and amid the ensuing hush a key was turned in the lock and the door partly opened, followed by the outward poke of a man's bushy head.

“ Barthélémi,” said Doré, jerking the door wide open, “ to reap your hair and whiskers would make quite a pillow. Aside, please, till we present Madame Brabant with a Flower from the Forge.”

Entering with a cynical smile, he bestowed a nod to those about him, and then turned to the others.

“ Mademoiselle,” said he to Deneige, for it was she, “ you have had a long journey, and have been put to some inconvenience. Now that the ride is over we hasten to also relieve you of that which precaution made it necessary to impose upon you. No harm is intended you in the least ; and the first disrespect shown you I shall be delighted to deal with—all we require of you being to decide for us in a matter of—ah—inquisitive importance. You cannot escape ; and any attempt to scream—well—but I am sure your good sense, Mademoiselle” (bowing) “ makes that impossible. We expect to detain you for a comparatively brief period only,” he continued, as, with Clément’s aid, he now removed the shawl, the veil, the new silk

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handkerchief over her mouth—all of which he had procured on the way back—and unbound her hands; “and by that time, if you are not too proud, you will perhaps allow us to reward your good behavior in the form most acceptable to you.”

The spirit of Deneige slumbered beneath impassiveness, and made no answer except through her eyes. These she turned on Regis Doré once, sweeping them from his face to Madame Brabant’s again for all the scrutiny one woman gives another between whom an irreconcilable unfriendliness immediately prevails. The latter sat at the farther end of an oblong table, tacked with a black and yellow-patterned oil-cloth—a stout faded blonde in the forties, with coarse skin, coarse features, and beady eyes. Equal in remark with a green dress was the amount of jewelry she wore. Two heavy gold bracelets apiece encircled her wrists; the stubby fingers were loaded with rings; a pair of solid gold ear-rings elongated the ears with their weight; a golden loop of oval links graced the neck; a medallion brooch was clasped at the throat; and, finally, engirdling the large waist of this extraordinary person, were seen the broad hammered bands of a gold chain, terminating in a gentleman’s gold watch that slightly showed in its pocket. The auriferous tint of all this display was matched by and concluded in a head of golden hair. This color was natural, however,

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inferences to the contrary; but here the effect ended—the threads composing its mass were short and thick and straight, and gathered—by way of punishment, perhaps—into a negligent knot.

On this occasion—including Madame Brabant, whose meek husband had departed this life several years ago—the full complement was present of what were known among themselves as “The Fulfillers.” The laws of this organization were founded on the motto, “Labor has nothing to fear from Law, if wisely directed;” and chiefly affected the imposition of Customs dues. When it became necessary to raise the revenue by other means, the brain of Madame Brabant never failed to devise something that succeeded as much through originality as the daring perpetration of it.

Besides Madame Brabant, the seven comprised an Englishman named Peter Bell, an English-Canadian called Fish, and four French-Canadians—a young, smart, reckless lawyer, Regis Doré, the brothers Basile and Clément Blais, and Barthélémi Pepin, whose abundance of hair had just come in for remark.

The room was neatly but rather showily papered; and the one small, deep, high window to it looked out into an old colonial court-yard, once shared in common by the contiguous divisions of the same block. One readily surmised that the room was a private apartment; and the filmy drift

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of tobacco smoke escaped from it by the open pipe-hole in the wall. Peter Bell's cigar burned on the edge of the table beside him, and Doré now turned from Deneige to Madame Brabant.

“You have a *moue*, I see, for me on my return, Julie,” he lightly said, “but when I make known to you the estimable qualities of our fair young friend here, I think it will disappear. *Mademoiselle de la Forge* has beauty and spirit both, but when we find wedded to these, in one so young, a capacity to think and act, the whole is of a fetching order; and so,” smiling over his *bon-mot*, “I brought her. Eloi Yell may be the fool you say he is, and the kind of fool we want, but he is also of a kind, I judge—better than the plain, ordinary, everyday fools that do the world’s business—that scents danger in time to escape it. Clément gave us the cue about this fellow, and we tried for him at his house—as crazy as himself—and in all his haunts. But with twenty Cléments to direct us, he was not to be found. The last of his resorts known to us was the smithy of one Paul Labouche. Here we came upon the blacksmith himself—the first we discovered ourselves or spoke to—and his daughter, *Mademoiselle Labouche*, to whom I now have the honor to present you. It was my privilege to perceive that this young lady was not particularly charmed with our presence from the first; and the careless inquiries I began putting about the imbecile, she

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derived an immediate pleasure in making go for nothing. Seeing this, and in the belief that the man was on the premises, I further alarmed Mademoiselle and mystified her father by handing the lamp she had held to Basile, and bidding him and Clément make an investigation. Meanwhile, with the worthy blacksmith seemingly at sea over the move, I conversed with Mademoiselle, and rapidly reached the novel conclusion that if Eloi Yell thwarted us also here, our ends would be as well if not better served by the young damsels instead. To communicate this to Clément and Basile (whom I could see had again drawn blanks in our hunt) without arousing suspicion was—ahem—the inspiration of true genius, and to the credit of ‘The Fulfillers,’ my friends, the brothers most nobly divined me. When I had ceased the reel and stagger and thick utterance of a drunkard, the father was half-way to our purposes on his back, while the daughter—well, I treated Mademoiselle as gently as I could, and if she complains, I can only express to her my profound regret that no politer means were safely available. It is my opinion, Madame and gentlemen, that the whim of one woman is not unlikely to be served best by the verdict of another; and if our ends must first provoke the pronouncing of folly, then let mine engage with you. You now have matters in a nutshell—and I see no beer about.”

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“‘Beer?’” and Madame jumped up—if so labored a movement could be called jumping up—in a great rage. “‘Beer?’ Not only have you dared to bring this doll into my presence, but to further cast the imprudence of your errand in our faces with a request for liquor. Is it possible that you, the framer of our Constitution, have so far taken leave of your senses in the present wretched matter as to forget that it is forbidden to touch a drop of anything alcoholic during the transaction of important business? As President I had the right to lay this injunction upon you before you left, Regis Doré—you heard me—and here you return with a whining tale, a frightened know-nothing to judge for us, and an insolent demand for drink. I tell you, gentlemen, that ‘The Fulfillers’ are going to the dogs to countenance these incomprehensible breaches of discipline; and however the rest may feel disposed, I decidedly refuse to be taken by the nose and defied into accepting a schoolgirl in place of Eloï Yell.”

“Hear, hear!” said Peter Bell, picking up his cigar. “You talk plain, don’t you? It’s not much of an invite for the young woman, but if nothing else, she’s pretty. I say let her stay. She’s hardly the goods we ordered, but Doré’s no man to monkey with a buzz-saw.”

Fish, a thin, middle-aged man with plastered hair, and the only one with his hat off, sat as

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Madame Brabant's *vis-a-vis* at the other end of the table, where he narrowly scanned Deneige as he bit on his moustache. Every movement he made was a quick one, and now turning to Madame Brabant he said, "See here, Julie, we gave in to you on Eloi Yell, and it's now your turn, as things have panned out, to do the graceful and give in to us. Since the girl is here, stop making a cheap show of yourself and open your arms to her like a mother."

As if she feared that these words were to be taken literally, Deneige recoiled a step—which did not escape Madame Brabant. With a responsive flush, therefore, and before Doré could proffer Deneige the chair Barthélémi pushed over to him with a foot, Madame Brabant had risen from hers and waddled forward.

"You need not trouble yourself, Monsieur Doré," she fumed. "If your mistress is to sit, she can have my seat."

Peter Bell puffed and then looked at his cigar, leaving Fish to lean upon the table and eye Deneige even more keenly.

The latter changed color with a shorter breath, clenched her hands, and turned to Regis Doré.

"Sir," she exclaimed, "you brought me here by force, but promised me your protection. I therefore beg of you, before I die of the shame of this false accusation, that you deny it for the slanderous charge that it is."

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“Amen!” encouraged Peter Bell, lowering his cigar and glancing up; “and if Doré don’t do it for you, I will. I’ve had a finger in some funny pies, but kidnapping girls ain’t one; and when they do find themselves that way, and somebody tries it on with them a little more, I ain’t only going to stand and look on—not me. So you’d better sit down, ‘Angel,’ and—”

“Madame Brabant,” interrupted Doré, “you will oblige me either by retracting your words or accepting my immediate resignation.”

“Enough personalities for the present,” observed Barthélémi. “We have something else to do than put up a game of bluff; let us get on with it. We are short a chair—”

“There is the window,” suggested Clément, promptly sitting down.

“Barthélémi can have that,” answered Basile, following his brother’s example.

“Oh, anything is good enough for Barthélémi,” that person retorted, “even the rudeness of a couple of balked fool-hunters.”

Madame Brabant measured Deneige with a glance, and then bestowed an uncompromising glare upon Regis Doré.

“I have been President of this institution since I founded it,” she began at the latter. “I have labored for it in a management to which more than one of you owe your present freedom. No

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predicament found me without resource. Over the unsafe places I built bridges for you. With things hot in one direction, I cooled them off in another—destroying scent, checking pursuit, and sometimes using the very dangers that threatened as a means of safeguarding us. There have been times, gentlemen" (looking around), "when you hung upon my words like children ; they meant salvation, *liberty* to you. Until to-night there never has been any question of my authority with you—I have been listened to like a class, and obeyed like the War Office. When in doubt of the law, the ability of Regis Doré enlightened us. Peter Bell—Fish—my compatriots—I studied you until I knew you better than you did yourselves ; and it was my perception, also, that assigned to you the parts you were best fitted to fill. To this one single fact, gentlemen, say what you will, is due the success that has constantly attended our efforts. With one exception, everything we had to do with is recalled with pardonable pride and satisfaction. We lost Ubalde Poupard at Baie des Roches, but it was the man's own fault—he invited capture. His *chaloupe* was near shore ; the water was not very deep, and had he slipped the rope and let the silk he towed sink, no harm would have come of it—the case was water-tight, and could easily have been fished up again. But no ; he relied too much upon his guise as a fisherman, and when the

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other boat put out to him the way it did, instead of a moment's attention at his oar-pin, he merely puffed and pulled away as if he were indeed only off for fish, and a couple of the Revenue Police anywhere but near. He had nerve, Ubalde—too much of it, as things turned out ; but honor holds him mute where he now is, and we have nothing to fear from him. Which brings us to your case, Monsieur Regis Doré. For odd and stated reasons I arrive at the conclusion that the presence of a fool is desirable with us this evening, and after patiently hearing what objections offer, and disposing of them, I take advantage of Clément's knowledge and despatch you with the brothers to bring us this Eloi Yell one of them speaks of. Instead of which you astound us by pursuing the opposite course : returning with a woman instead of a man, and a person of sound mind in place of one weak. You have your reasons for such extraordinary conduct, and give them ; but in all the times I have listened to you, Regis Doré, the present is a spectacle by contrast. You have made an ass of yourself, and but remind of an ass the more you attempt to justify your blunder. You have been guilty of inexplicable folly, Regis Doré—the stupidity that swings men, and shuts them up. You have brought this petticoated object in here, free to see, scream, kick, or use her hands. To release her again invites the very

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worst upon us ; and to do away with her means no end of bother. And there we are, looking into the pot and afraid to put the cover on. You are mad, Regis Doré, to put us in this abominable plight ; and as you are answerable for your acts, you shall answer for this. For once you have presumed to think that because you are sharp and shrewd and learned in the law, you are indispensable to us, and can take upon yourself to substitute a sudden intemperate fancy of your own for the debated instructions I gave you. There has been a change in you of late, Monsieur Doré, and if it is the power I wield and my position you covet, I shall soon convince you that both remain with the right person. You brought this girl here to judge, you say ? Then she shall judge, and that immediately. Place a chair against the wall, Barthélémi, for Mademoiselle. She shall occupy it, and, no doubt, increase our respect for the wool-sack. Your part in this girl's abduction, Basile and Clément, is a secondary one. We will overlook your offence to guard the door and window—as long as I remain here, Monsieur Doré is a prisoner. I impeach him before you, gentlemen, as guilty of gross negligence and insubordination. He shall be tried on the spot ; Mademoiselle imposing sentence as we instruct. These proceedings are not a farce, gentlemen ; and if any two or more of you think so, and combine to act accordingly, I will immediately walk

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out of here to the nearest police station, and claim the immunity the law affords to an **INFORMER**."

Having finished, the voluble Madame Brabant swept a look about her with her small eyes, and then waddling back to her chair, plumped herself down in it again.

Peter Bell studied his cigar as if mentally engaged with the *Philosophy of Smoking*; and as Fish straightened in his chair, Regis Doré sat down, crossed his feet, and lit a weed of his own.

"I like to hear you talk sometimes, I do," said Fish to Madame Brabant. "You're a dashed swift thinker, 'Angel,' I'll allow; but big as your brain is, it don't seem to grasp the fact that when you started from here to put up the job on us you hint at, one of us might just happen to be in the way."

Madame Brabant searched in her dress and produced a pearl-handled revolver.

"The thing speaks for itself," she answered, laying it down on the table before her, "and six times at that. If anyone tried to stop me, well"—(shrugging)—"his general health might suffer."

"Just so," languidly assented Peter Bell; and then one of his long arms shot forth and back and the weapon was gone. "But I think your pill-producer is safer with me—its influence is not always for the best. Anyway, you won't dirty it by pulling the trigger, and that's something. Now, I own up to everybody that 'The Angel' is a ree-markable

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woman—a sentiment I believe I gave way to once before, when we began circulating a few fresh works of art in the currency line. And I repeat, that ‘The Angel’ is a ree-markable woman. Just when I’d made up my mind that Doré had gone and done a clever thing, she rips up all the planks of my opinion and puts in a new flooring. And while I walk on this I want to say that I am now one of a committee bound to see this matter through as the Woman in Yellow” (Madame Brabant again) “wants it. Having the common interests at heart, she has every right to demand it.”

“I am quite agreeable,” acquiesced Doré.

Meanwhile Madame Brabant had repressed a scream, snatched at nothing, and then, not a little crestfallen, had given Peter Bell a wicked look for the trick he played her. But this resentment quickly fled for a feeling of bold satisfaction to find herself so outspokenly supported by him ; and as the stand he took was generally influencing, and an index to the policy of the others, Madame Brabant, winning on the first throw, threw again.

“Out with the truth boldly, then,” she, changing expression, rapped to Doré. “You brought the girl along with you for some purpose—what is it? Nobody but a child would believe your object is to serve our interests ; and a frank confession will not only save valuable time to us, but perhaps relieve us of some if not all of our anxiety.”

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“Whew!” put in Fish, “but you’re in a temper to-night. There’s no call to insult the girl to her face, is there?”

“Madame Brabant,” said Doré sternly, “this is twice in a few minutes that you have assailed the character of an innocent person. Like yourself, I have been connected with this organization from the beginning, and of all the unpleasant duties obliged of me since then, the discharging of the present is not the least, or one over which I have any intention of hesitating. You compel me to remind you that the unsullied reputation of Mademoiselle Labouche is in my keeping, unfit custodian as I may be of it; and if a third effort is made to humiliate this person in her own and our sight, I warn you now of the lie and its consequences. If this is a court of inquiry, then for decency’s sake let it continue as such; but if it is to be a theatre for the display of animosity, I’ll very quickly close it up.”

“Hanged if I quite see the reason yet for all this fuss,” said Fish, testily. “Doré acted for the best, I haven’t a doubt, and now you’re down on him, ‘Angel,’ you and Peter Bell, as if he had come back to camp with the smallpox. Now, according to the way I look at things, it’s unfair—you and Peter Bell are in the wrong, and worrying the girl is going to do anything but mend matters. Doré fetched her here for the same purpose that he would have that fellow Yell—to—”

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“Stop!” cried Madame Brabant, raising a hand.  
“Remember where you are.”

“The same idea occurred to me while you were speaking,” Fish coolly replied as he continued; “to answer the following riddle: *A man desires to make a journey on foot, in strict seclusion. Given the number of miles and kind of country, pick out on the map before you the route most likely to be taken; with reasons for its selection, and an estimate in pounds of the baggage he ought to be able to carry?* Now, we all had a whack at it, didn’t we? And when we came to compare notes, it was like pay-day in a cheese-factory—no two calculations were alike. And then our good ‘Angel’ flew to the rescue, and ordered in a fool. ‘A fool,’ quoth she, ‘is a fox when hunted,’ and—by George! the woman’s right!—WE DIDN’T GET ELOI YELL, DID WE? Gentle Heaven! I was home all the time and didn’t know it! Doré, you’re a bigger fool than the one you went after—the girl has done you brown, man—she’s made off with you, not you with her. Hang it! what good is she except to look at? She may skim milk, but when it comes to tussling with the problem of ‘The Shy Man with a Pack on a Journey,’ to settle seven disputes, I’ll be—but I guess I’ll sell out here, and spare your feelings. And the girl is certainly a picture. To tell the truth, boys, I started in with the intention of giving Doré a lift, but if any of you want to know it, the polish is all

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off this sentiment now, and I'm right bang in with Peter Bell and 'The Angel.'

Madame shot a triumphant glance at Regis Doré, and then one of a different quality at Den-eige.

Doré was half way through his cigar, and now flicked the ash off it to remark: "The case is in a fair way of being decided against me. And Madame Brabant is no more anxious to save time than I am. So we will consider the charge proven if it lets me at a bottle of ale. It must be horrible to die of thirst."

"You are flippant," Madame Brabant observed, with quick contempt.

"No, only thirsty," Doré half smiled to say. "Our search gave us no end of tramping."

"What about the rest?" inquired Peter Bell, with a look around.

"I approve for form's sake," Barthélémi diplomatically answered.

Basile and Clément Blais, however, maintained a dogged silence. Then Fish eased the situation out of sheer impatience.

"Oh, never mind any more," he said, hardly giving the brothers the chance to speak had they wished it. "The matter is not one of life and death, and a majority does for conviction. Let us fix the penalty."

"The girl does that," corrected Peter Bell.

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"Only as we direct," added Madame Brabant tartly. "I will choose several for her to pick from."

"You?" said Fish. "Sift me! but down to the dog under the wagon you want to be horse and driver and all to-night. Well, never mind—do as you please—you've got a head on you, and I guess we can safely leave it to you to finish. Only don't go and rake up a lot of chips no fire will burn."

There was a stir where Deneige sat.

"Have you no regulations," she now felt composed enough to ask, "that provide for such occasions as this?"

"Pret-ty good!" chuckled Fish, with an admiring look.

"We have, and we have not," Peter Bell slowly responded. "You see, it's this way: Doré drew up our Constitution, and an A1 job he made of it. But we suspended the rules to send for this wily beggar Yell, and there they hang on their peg yet."

"Then if Monsieur Doré committed an indiscretion when your laws did not apply," Deneige more resolutely continued, "how can you try him for what does not legally exist?"

"*Correct!*!" cried Basile from the window, slapping his thigh. "*Sacré!* Regis, what's the matter with you? You're a nice kind of a lawyer not to have seen this point before."

"Am I?" Doré coolly returned. "How do you

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know I was not intimate with it from the beginning?"

"Then if you were," retorted Fish, "and kept it all this time to yourself, you're deep in a game of your own all right enough. And so is 'The Angel,' and hanged if I don't begin to think the girl is, too."

Here Barthélémi puffed out his cheeks, and from the corner of his eyes stole a look, first at Deneige, and then at Madame Brabant.

*"Amour de Dieu!"* he sung in a low key. "Then if this is an affair of three only, why should eight take part?"

"Because," returned Madame Brabant angrily, "they have every right to; it is not an affair of three only."

"My regards to Madame Brabant," said Doré slowly, scrutinizing his cigar, "but I am afraid our views conflict."

Fish pushed back from the table with an oath. "I said this was a three-cornered tangle," he testily exclaimed, "and now I'm sure of it. You'll have to excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, but this is where I get off. I travelled a bit beyond this once in the same kind of a rig, and the memory of that trip is a little lasting."

Madame Brabant arose. "You are a coward!" she hurled, foreseeing the effect his words would have.

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“Thank you!” replied Fish. “You simply convince me that I’m right.”

“Look here,” said Peter Bell, throwing the last of his cigar into the spittoon and sitting up. “I’m not spoiling to take a hand in this business except on principle. But it seemed only fair, the way ‘The Angel’ put things, that we should hold a sort of a slap investigation over the outcome of Doré’s little jaunt, and take measures to protect ourselves, if necessary, against any serious consequences. Now, I don’t care a straw how much ferrying Fish does—I have my own ideas and hold to them, and I say this, that as ‘The Angel’ has declared that the subject is one for all, and as Doré disputes the truth of this statement, I think it rests with him to make his words good, or swallow his medicine like a man.”

“To do as you ask,” replied Doré, “requires more in *finesse* than your heavy nature can supply. If I must clear myself in such a manner I will, but I would much prefer to be relieved of this extreme necessity. But trust my honorable intentions to you all, gentlemen, and Mademoiselle Labouche and I will go as we came; and on my oath as a ‘Fulfiller’ I will answer for it that the young woman is a silent witness of what she has seen and heard this evening.”

“I know no more than the rest of you,” observed Clément from the door, “what Regis has in mind,

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but his request rings true in my ears and has my consent."

"Never will it have mine, then," said Madame Brabant, harshly; "and what is more, Monsieur Regis Doré has now incriminated himself to an extent that cannot and shall not be overlooked."

"This *is* a mix-up!" shrugged Barthélémi. "And we're getting farther away than ever from our first intention."

"The room is beastly hot!" complained Fish, mopping his brow. "For heaven's sake open the window and let's have some fresh air."

This being seconded by Peter Bell, Basile—to the relief of everyone but Madame Brabant—unhasped and opened the window, and made sure of the shutters.

"There's a threat behind your words, Doré, I don't like," bluntly continued Peter Bell. "If you've got anything to remark concerning any one of us, it concerns us all, and the sooner you break away from all tall talk and come out and say like a man what you've got hidden away in your head, the sooner we'll know whether you're chopping wood or only whittling."

Doré again knocked the ashes off his cigar, and after a moment's hesitation looked up. But before he could speak Deneige was on her feet, attracting every eye and silencing him.

"Messieurs," she said, slightly flushing, and

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without glancing at Fish, who undeniably winced, "I acknowledge that I am able to 'skim milk,' as one of you has interested himself on my behalf to suppose; and of the problem of 'The Shy Man with a Pack on a Journey' I can say this much—that if he travels by night he is less liable to be caught, and his goods confiscated by the officials of Her Majesty's Customs. But you also make known to me, Messieurs, that I, a country girl, poor and without accomplishments, am able to inform your city ease and elegance further. Until this evening Monsieur Doré has been a stranger to me—I cannot recall, even, having ever seen his face. The bitterness I nursed against him, however, is now gone to find him the instrument of another, and through me, whom he has since befriended, most unpleasantly placed. And that I, in turn, should now befriend him is both natural and exacted of me as a duty. Messieurs, you are blind—all blind; and that it is left with a simple country girl to open your eyes is not the least wonderful part of it. Monsieur Doré was about to speak when I interrupted—I saw him battling with the finer instincts of a gentleman, however he may be engaged with you in your work—and so in pity I snatched from him to say myself what he was about to. In short, Monsieur Doré is taken to task, not so much for an excess of zeal for bringing me to you in place of Eloi Yell, as in not foreseeing

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that the act would beget the last thing you look for, Messieurs,"—

At this point Madame Brabant, having struggled to her feet, kicked away her chair, and with ponderous celerity almost ran towards Deneige, her fist and voice on the shake as she exclaimed : "Another word, you hell-cat, and I'll tear you to pieces ! Go, if you want to, and good riddance to you, but if another syllable escapes you here I'll—"

" You'll what ?" Doré stepped between them to politely ask.

But Madame Brabant failed to finish, and fell back instead ; her drawn lips apart, revealing yellow teeth ; a shuttling movement at work in her eyes ; her hands clenched ; her face pudgy beneath its inartistic hair ; and the stoutness of her short person bedecked with the trappings of much jewelry.

" Pardon the interruption," apologized Peter Bell to Deneige. " And will you please go on."

" I was about to add," Deneige concluded, in a much lower tone, with averted eyes, " that Monsieur Doré was found fault with, not so much for exceeding instructions, as on account of jealousy, Messieurs. In truth, Madame Brabant is pleased to consider me as a RIVAL."

" Huh !" Fish remarked, with a straight face, " she's anything but pleased, if you ask me."

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"A rival?" puzzled Peter Bell. "How in the mischief d'ye make that out?"

Deneige blushed, hesitated, and then, in a barely audible voice, answered, "To the affections of Monsieur Doré, here."

That this was the truth the new light on every face acknowledged. Then, while looks passed and astonishment rounded at the news, and Madame Brabant, in motionless, speechless enmity, took counsel with herself against Deneige, a blow behind Basile at the window sent him staggering towards the centre of the room, whilst in his wake, like wolves, two scrambling figures entered—Eloi Yell, for one, followed by no less than the maltreated blacksmith himself, Paul Labouche.

### V.

BASILE, taken wholly off his guard, muttered disjointedly, recovered his balance, and turned. But instead of flinging himself upon whomsoever it might be that had thus and so completely caught him napping, he took root in a quick stand before Eloi Yell to see Paul Labouche behind him.

Deneige, too, at the sight of her father, seemed incapable of anything at the moment but an incredulous, overjoyed stare, a condition that Regis Doré took advantage of to seize her by the arm and whisper, "Silence, whatever you do, or you will have the whole neighborhood here."



"A blow behind Basile at the window sent him staggering" — p. 40.



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Deneige gave him a look that unloosed his grasp with something like an extorted apology ; while Eloi Yell, if he saw her, made no sign, but with a leer, humped shoulders and a dandling carry of the hands, thus addressed the general consternation :

“ Eloi Yell, well, he may be a fool, but he knows when to leave Paul’s place—when to come back. I am uneasy of myself, and go. I am disturbed in thought, and remain about. I peep in the window, and see a lot. Then out goes the lamp for a scuffle. Eloi Yell descends—*bon !* He steals through the darkness to the front of the house—*b’en-bon !* Three came, four depart—*diable !* Eloi Yell has good eyes. A match? yes. They have just gone—they might return—a risk? yes—but we take it, and enter. It is Paul Labouche I find. *Mère de Dieu* protect Deneige. Paul Labouche is a mad man. I unbind him—I calm him—I make him see as I do. Eloi Yell may be a fool, but God works through him to do wonders. He loves his life, does Eloi Yell, but he loves the welfare of Deneige also. She was always kind ; others only so when not making free for sport. Eloi Yell may be simple, but his legs lose nothing by that in speed to follow. The night is black—lightning spits and thunder growls, but we are not discouraged. At the top of the hill we sweat—we pause—we peer—we listen. Our ears reward us. A white flash, a loud

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peal comes—then a great hush—and then the rain, *bon Dieu!* by the bucketful. But by that time we are off again in a dash for the carriage we saw. Five minutes pass—ten—fifteen—then twenty minutes. We breathe hard, but our wind is the endurance of heaven. At last we catch up. We are nearly spent—we can do nothing but hang on behind, and run as pulled along. We are soaked, but that is nothing—something tells us that the vehicle carries those we are after. When it stops we stop, ready for action. By and by we reach the city—not many people about—too wet—we pass through the streets—at Jacques Cartier Square Paul Labouche slips—he cannot get on his feet again—I try to help him—and, *sacré!* we both let go. But we have no thought of giving up. Again we follow. We turn along St. Paul—our hearts leap—the carriage stops—people get out—too far away to count—they disappear—and the carriage next around a corner. But Eloi Yell is not baffled. We arrive before a large building, with many windows, many doors in it. We stand puzzled—all doors are alike—we cannot tell which to enter—and we look about us. Paul Labouche is rash without Eloi Yell. I restrain him—I pull him in an archway—we pass through to the rear, which I stealthily examine. Paul Labouche is no good but to walk up and down, up and down, in the dark corner where I thrust him, like one with the

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toothache. I come back to him—I take him by the arm, and say, 'Something is going on in there,' and point to a ground window. It is barred and shuttered, but that is no matter. Paul Labouche bounds off, and then back again. '*Grand Dieu!* we will soon know for certain,' says he, savagely, and with a stick of cordwood he would have smashed in the window. My patience gives out, and I swear. 'Who is the fool now,' I ask, 'you or I, Paul Labouche? Put down your log. You have a stout knife—so have I. The stone is soft—we will work the iron out—then the shutters off. Perhaps the window is curtained, and we cannot see. But we can hear better, and that may be enough. Then if we feel warranted, we will secure help and enter.' We fall to work. After a while the window inside is pulled open. Our hearts beat—we have been heard—we draw back, one on either side of the window close up against the wall, ready to pounce and succor—but the blinds remain closed. Now we can hear, and how we bend to it! *Deneige!* *Mon Dieu!* it is Deneige herself we soon hear speaking. I have a struggle with Paul Labouche; I overcome him. 'By everything holy!' I breathe, locking him up against the wall with my arms, 'if you are not more cautious we are dead men. Then who is to save Deneige?' This has its effect. I make one more appeal. 'Paul Labouche,' I say, 'when we go in I go

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first. When we are in, stay you behind me till I do this,' " and with a bow that brought a smile—so much like a rehearsal was it with Eloi Yell at his part—the speaker next straightened into a clownish pose, and then, humming and alternately pirouetting on a foot, moved insensibly nearer to Peter Bell. As though under the spell imposed on the others, Paul Labouche exhibited the same degree of strained interest in the antics of his companion. That all fancies but his were cheated, however, was soon made manifest, for as Eloi Yell stopped and stooped, he was off like an arrow ; and as Eloi Yell, with the ease and agility of an acrobat (a more startling change is seldom seen), leaped away from Peter Bell with Madame Brabant's revolver in his possession—one of the first things that caught his eye on gaining the room, and which he had just successfully tricked to himself—Paul Labouche was beside his daughter, prepared to make good his fathership.

At this Barthélémi, in close proximity to Deneige, backed up with some force against Madame Brabant, planting a heel on her toes as well. The spell was broken ; and Madame Brabant's cry of pain and stinging slap announced it. Barthélémi ducked, expecting more of the same, and came to grief against the table, which, begging away from him on its castors, gave him to the carpet and caught Peter Bell hip-high on the side as he rose and turned in

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red-faced astonishment after Eloi Yell. Thus overbalanced into his chair again, Peter Bell next tumbled with it to the floor; while Eloi Yell, coming to a stand in front of the window, levelled his weapon and cried—

“Come on, Deneige—come on, Paul—you are free, and this is the way out! The man that interferes disputes with God through me!”

At this, Clément, on guard at the door, crossed himself, and regarded the speaker awedly; but Madame Brabant, far differently affected, hurried to bar escape even as Eloi Yell spoke.

“But I am a WOMAN,” said she, with bosom heaving after her immortal effort, “that dares dispute with ANYONE; and who is NOT to be intimidated, even by her own weapon. Seize and disarm him!” she commanded, pointing to Eloi Yell, “while I teach this bold, brassy she-devil,” turning on Deneige, “what it means to lie about respectable women like me.”

“I never struck a woman in my life,” solemnly said Paul Labouche, confronting her, “but God help you or anyone else that makes it necessary to strike a blow now. I say, beware, Madame, of that tongue of yours, and stand aside before I make you.” Then to his daughter he continued: “Deneige, my child,” anxiously glancing at her and then about them, “if anything has befallen you that one should suffer for, but point out the person and I—”

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“None, father,” she assured him ; but before she could proceed further, he was now addressing Doré.

“As for you, sir,” he sternly said, “I have good reason to know and remember your face. The moment I see my daughter safe again, that moment begins the pleasure I contemplate in dealing with you as you deserve.”

“True, father,” and the look Deneige gave him puzzled him as much as her words ; “and in gratefulness will we do it.”

“How?” exclaimed the astonished blacksmith. “What do you mean?”

Madame Brabant at once saw her chance.

“You may well ask,” she simulated. “Do not boast yourself, Lamouche—Labouche—whatever your name is—I am not the kind that hear threats or heed them. But you wish to hear the truth, and should, and shall. This man” (pointing to Doré) “brought your daughter here for his purposes, not ours, and when we would take him to task for it, Mademoiselle, mark you, instead of thanks, cavils at us for love’s sake. And not only that, but to it she adds spitefulness, charging me with things that are abominably untrue. Your coming is more than opportune—it is providential, and finds us in the very midst of our indignation. Your daughter bears your name only in the lowest respect, but you may yet save her. Do not linger,

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but take her home with you at once, and on her bare back apply the rod. Then shut her up in a convent and see that she stays there, and you will have done your duty. Otherwise"—but here Madame Brabant left off for a more expressive shrug instead.

Paul Labouche listened without a move. Then, as if just out of an ugly dream, he turned from Madame Brabant to Regis Doré, and, with his slow glance still travelling, from the latter to Deneige.

*“Mon Dieu! Deneige, pride of my heart—my chief joy and greatest consoler,”* he now besought, plainly charged with grief, “what do these words mean with those you have just uttered?”

That her father should entertain such an atrocious charge against her proved the last straw to Deneige. Hitherto she had borne herself with dignity and courage—the composure of innocence—that ranked her high in the estimation of all but Madame Brabant. Now, when the last person in the world that should—according as she then felt—not only hearkened to calumny against her, but went so far as to require her, his first-born, whom he knew as well as he did himself, to refute that which, on the face of it—as his own instincts ought to tell him—was base misrepresentation, the inevitable reaction of all set in, and Deneige broke down in tears.

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“ See ! ” said Madame Brabant, pointing a virtuous finger. “ See—she cannot answer you.”

“ No, but I can and will,” said Regis Doré. “ I told you, Paul Labouche, when your daughter bade you adieu with us that it was only for a short while, and that she would return to you none the worse for a little diversion. I pledged you in the presence of Basile and Clément here, to insist upon the proprieties being accorded her during her absence from home, and I think that when Mademoiselle is herself again, she, besides informing you why we sought one and took another, will, I feel sure, support me in the statement that I have endeavored to fulfil the promise I made you to the letter—for all our sakes. And this consideration yet moves me to speak, no matter at what cost, and mark my detestation of the unprincipled attack made upon your daughter’s goodness, with what I know and beg you to believe is the truth. In brief—”

“ ‘ In brief,’ in sooth, you puppy ! ” cried Madame Brabant, shrilly. “ Stop where you are, and go drown yourself in ale if you like. If nothing else, peace will come of it.”

“ I second the motion,” said Fish, in disgust. “ Things *are* in a pickle ; and I, for one, am sick of the whole business. I vote we adjourn—instanter. Doré will look after the girl all right.”

In answer to a signal at the door, Clément opened it a few inches.

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"Less noise," warned Louis Beauchamp, in a stage-whisper, and with exaggeration. "People can hear you from the street."

"Go on," said the blacksmith, with a set face, to Regis Doré. "I am not here to be toyed with. What has been said and done against my daughter has been said and done against me. Eloi Yell covers you all yet; and a man that works iron, as I do, has a degree of it in his strength. Yea, and more—rage doubles it; and if bones are to be broken for this night's doings, and the perpetration you have put upon God-fearing folk, they will not be mine. Proceed with your story, sir, and" (turning to Madame Brabant) "any interference from you, Madame, before he finishes, will be risking your putty face for more than it is worth."

"In brief, then," continued Regis Doré, meeting the blacksmith's gaze steadily, "the person you last addressed is alone responsible for the present state of affairs. She imagines"—but at this juncture the speaker was obliged to desist, and give all his attention to Madame Brabant.

With one hand plucking at her dress, this person now made such good use of the other, that Regis Doré, backing away from the unexpected onslaught, required both his to prevent bodily harm being done him. Even to Paul Labouche, no one seemed disposed at first to attempt to separate Madame Brabant from the object of her fury; while the

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effect upon Deneige was one of quick recovery from what threatened to end in hysterics.

“You miserable wretch!” screamed Madame Brabant. “You never will have another woman to love you as I did; but even love will turn when dragged out from its bosom, as you would now do with mine, for others to eye and scoff and grin at.”

“If it is your pistol you are after,” said Doré, as calmly as he could, “perhaps Eloi Yell will lend it to you.”

“I never did depend on one thing alone,” Madame Brabant in a passion replied; and with that her hand, from fumbling in her dress, came out and went up. A glint, a blow, a rush from several, a shriek from Deneige, and then Regis Doré staggered back into the arms of Clément.

“This puts an end to ‘The Fulfillers,’ too, I guess!” and, twisting from his chair, Fish immediately made for the window. “Good-bye, boys; no inquest for me, thank you!—I’m off to the States. Ta, ta!” and passing Eloi Yell, who under the circumstances had no thought of stopping him, he climbed through the window and left.

Another rapping at the door preceded the low voice of Louis Beauchamp. “*Mon Dieu!*” he pleaded, “you are getting worse instead of better. Stop quarrelling, or leave—I’m on pins and needles with such a racket.”

“All right, Louis, we’re about finished,” replied

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Peter Bell, and getting up he creaked over to the statuesque Madame Brabant.

“Look here, Julie,” he hoarsely said, pointing to Doré with Clément kneeling beside him, and speaking as if he anticipated some trouble to make her understand, “do you know what you have done? It is MURDER, woman—nothing short of actual murder, if this man dies—and every second you now spend here tells against you. Vanish, if you would save your short neck; get a hair-cut, and into man’s clothes, and buy a foreign ticket,” and dragging rather than leading her to the door, Peter Bell unlocked and opened it—the key being in the lock—and then, like Fish, they disappeared.

Eloi Yell was in two minds whether or no to fire until it was too late; and when Paul Labouche, realizing what it meant to them if Doré died or was already dead, and the woman escaped, sprang forward to detain her, Clément, on his knees and past whom he brushed, caught him by the coat-tails and jerked him back, imploring, “Let them go, let them go if they want to, and help me with Doré—if nothing else, he will bleed to death. Call Louis, Basile; and you, Barthélémi, run for a priest and the doctor as if the police were after you.”

For a moment the latter looked half-witted. Then in seeming obedience he made his way over to and clumsily out of the window. Once there, however, his whole bearing changed, and stooping

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down he called with his hands to his mouth, “ If you want your man of God or of medicine, send Basile. I have something to do besides running errands for one who calls my hair ‘ pillow-stuffing.’ ”

Then he bolted, but not quickly enough to entirely lose the volley of execrations that sped after him.

“ Heaven surely hid its face,” said Paul Labouche, with a very long one himself, as he dropped on a knee opposite Clément to render what aid he could to the prostrate form between them, “ when this thing occurred. As I ran from the smithy I invoked the help of the Holy Mother, and I verily believe we have here the retribution I prayed for.”

“ *Pardon!* ” and the pair sat back on their heels with a start as Doré propped himself up on an arm. “ Dead men sometimes have ears, and closed eyes are not always a sign of unconsciousness. I shut mine, and suffered the loss of a little blood, for a ruse ; and now that it has succeeded and Madame Brabant is gone, I will go, too—but not quite in the manner she intended I should. ‘ The Angel’ has her own way of wooing, but, with all its monotony, I prefer the old fashion.”

“ The mischief! ” interrupted Clément. “ Lie down, Doré, and keep still—you bleed like a pig when you sit up. A cushion for his head, Basile, then a basin of water, and all the lint Louis can lay his hands on.”

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“A moment!” cried Deneige in some confusion. “It may not be wise to alarm Monsieur Beau-champ just yet. I can provide you in abundance, gentlemen.”

A few seconds later and she came forward again, tearing a white petticoat into strips, and giving them to her father. “Take these,” she gravely said, sitting down to gently place Doré’s head in her lap, “and knot them together—you want something long to tie around him. Wrap and draw tight—as tightly as you can” (the wound being a high one on the left side)—“then he can be moved for proper treatment with less danger.”

“He bleeds out instead of in, which is a good sign,” said Clément half to himself, as he and Paul Labouche set to work with the petticoat.

“Let him stay here,” gruffly advised the latter, “and send your brother for a doctor. ’Twill save time and trouble.”

“With your kind permission, gentlemen,” Regis Doré opened his eyes to remark, “I avoid all publicity in the matter. Neither here, nor the hospital, nor my apartments, will do—you must find me other quarters, and having found which you can find me a doctor—not before. I know I am hurt, but not badly; I can breathe—speak—move, even, without much pain, and”—but, as if to belie his words, he here with a little gasp left off and closed his eyes again.

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"You have lost more blood than you care to admit," Clément glanced at the changing face to say—and Deneige started.

Throughout the length of the next minute no one spoke; Deneige being as busy with anxious thought as the others were with Doré.

Then a delicate pink warmed the normal whiteness of the girl's cheeks, and a hand stole up to her throat. At last she opened her lips.

"*Père*," she nervously, hurriedly, studiously said—all in one—"we shall take him home with us. It is our duty."

Eloi Yell had previously drawn near them, and, relapsed into his usual reticence and humped attitude, stood watching the others with a glance that occasionally and watchfully strayed towards the window. As Deneige spoke he shot her a look, and next transferred it to her father.

"Paul Labouche," he now droned, "I am the Eloi Yell that people deride—whom they deny the right to live. If I am foolish, the wisdom of God is behind it. I see things nobody else sees. I hear things impossible to others. My heart is peace—I have no troubles—I am love to all things. Envy—uncharitableness—vain ambition, have no part with me. For my eccentricities my neighbors despise me. Yet I am without bitterness—I do not rail back—my soul instructs me cheerful, contented and happy. I freed you, Paul Labouche

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—I brought you to your daughter—I now give you some advice—all good. You have no son—too bad! Take this man home with you, and care for him. When he recovers he will be as a son to you. Try it, Paul Labouche, and see if it is not so. Your daughter ventures to ask it of you, but Eloi Yell urges it upon you.”

“If—it—is—my—duty,” said Paul Labouche, slowly, and after a pause, rubbing his troubled brow, “I—suppose—I—have—no—choice.”

“A *charette*,” and Eloi Yell addressed himself to Basile, who wondered at the unwonted briskness. “Get a hay-cart, somewhere, with plenty of straw in it.”

Which was done.

.....

The rest of that summer drifted into autumn, and fall succumbed to winter. When, in turn, winter relented in favor of spring, the truth in Eloi Yell’s words was realized—Deneige became Madame Regis Doré.

But by that time Regis Doré was another man.

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The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.  
—The Book.

THE sword was drawn from the scabbard of fate, and Zenophile Brouillard thumbed the edge of it.

Big men have big hearts, and that of Zenophile was accordingly large. We do not know the exact size of it, but its owner stood six feet one and one-half inches in his boots, and could boast of a heavy drooping moustache, a head of hair and a pair of eyes, that were all well matched in black. He could also handle with ease a block of stone that would trouble another man to move. But these are immaterial things.

The Avenue Mont Royal runs east and west—the quarries lying north of it; both suburban to a great city—a city noted for its handsome men. But this is also immaterial to the subject.

To stroll along the Avenue Mont Royal, or through its vicinity, on a hot summer's day, is to fill the mind with a glimpse of a scene inviolably local, and stamped with characteristics nowhere to be found outside the Province of Quebec.

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It was in this quarter that some dynamite went off, early one winter's morning, with the man thawing it, and a sound like to the Last Trumpet. It scooped out for him in the frozen ground a grave big enough for ten men, and for once in its history Montreal awoke sharp at five-thirty. One half got up and dressed for Judgment; the other half simply turned over and went to sleep again, blissfully unconscious of the fact that the city's population had thus reported itself as reduced by one in atoms, with twenty wrecked houses in at the death. But this also is immaterial.

Take the Avenue Mont Royal just after the fire reels have passed by; or when the police patrol gallops past with a blood-curdling clang; or an ambulance from one of the city hospitals, on the dead run, b-r-r-r-s the whole neighborhood into immediate and intense excitement. The street swarms in a trice, and we will take a walk through it.

Observe, first of all, that there is a babel of sound, expressed in no tongue but that of French Canada. The early French settlers and aborigines commingled to this effect; and the language their descendants speak to-day is not to be found in books. The union of the two races has also left its impress upon character, too, in a most striking manner. But we pass on.

Children?—no end to them; large families are

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the rule among these people. Go where you like in a house, and you will find a youngster in every room—or a highly vocal gathering of them all in one. On the street you stumble across them at every step.

But the fighters of destruction, disorder or disease have responded to the call they received ; and the populace are turned out, like the contents of an upsetting, to learn and see what they can. Open windows, filled up with faces that look down on a scene of noisy confabulation, take an animated part in the unlettered proceedings of a narrow street.

*“Mon Dieu !”* exclaims Madame Despard, folding her arms complacently on a second story window-sill, and addressing her similarly situated neighbor opposite, “whose house is it this time?”

To which the other, Mde. Gamache, *modiste*—according to the black and yellow painted tin sign by the door—desists from chewing gum sufficiently long enough to say—

“It’s not a fire. The police patrol has just gone up Rue Carriere. ’Twill be a mercy if it’s not murder.”

“Bah !” returns the other, with an indifferent shrug, “a thousand to one that it’s that wretch of a Christin beating his wife again. He has but come from Payette’s” (the jail) “to go back.”

But it is impossible for us to follow the volubility that fills the street, and which bridges it from one

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window to another. Old Tancrede Lebel, smoking a short brier pipe filled with evil-smelling tobacco, wends his way to the street through the alley in rear of which he lives, and stands there and puffs—a little bent old man in his shirtsleeves, loosely hung with an open vest, whose shrivelled skin, and puckered, pinched and wrinkled face reminds, in appearance and color, of a dry shrunken horse-chestnut.

“*Bon jour, Tancrede!*”

“*B'jour, m'sieu, b'jour!*”

“What is all the fuss about, Tancrede?”

Tancrede enfolds his pipe in the clutching hold of an exceedingly lean and trembling hand, and returns our glance with eyes not very clear, not very steady, beneath shaggy brows; but the answering light on the old man's face is genuine.

“Fuss—fuss; w'at you call d'at?”

We explain.

“Oh! h'English ‘fuss’ she stan' for w'at you mean h'excitement. *Oui, je comprend.* I'm not know myself the trouble w'at is, an' I come for fin' h'out. She's beeg fire in a chimney or somet'ing I dunno. I'm see not'ing, but hear a beeg bell strike vera queek, an' I go for see w'at's up. I'm not vera cur'ous me like the people here w'at lives, but, *sapristi!* I'm come for w'at she's wort', an' pass my time. *Mais arrête-un-peu!* Stop yourselves, gentlemen. Here's Adelard. He's know

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pretty much ev'ryt'ing w'at's not good for heem. I'm h'ax heem for you, messieurs."

"Adelard—Adelard!" to a barefooted urchin of twelve, dressed in unmentionables that can be classified neither with trousers nor knickerbockers, a faded striped cotton shirt, and a straw hat with the crown and brim parting company.

The latter, bolting by, looks around without deigning an answer, when "Adelard—Adelard!" repeated, brings him to a stop.

"*Une seconde—viens-cit!*"

Adelard impatiently approaches, and out of respect to ourselves Tancrede addresses him in English.

"The matter, w'at ees it?"

"*Fe'me ta gueule*, you old fool! Police, police! Ha-ha-ha!"

Tancrede hurls a parting invective after the derisive and now doubly hastening Adelard, and turns to us with a flash in his eyes.

"You see for yourselves w'at I'm tole you. I'm pay heem h'up w'en he's for nex' time my reach. I'm bet myself on d'at. W'at for he calls me an old fool"—(shrugging)—"I dunno. *Bon!* I'm fix heem yet. By Gorr! I'm ponch heem in de *visage*, an' give heem such plenty cuff wit' my fist, he's wish heemself in jail for a mont'—*sacré!*"

But this only remotely concerns our story.

In this vicinity it was that Eloise Moreau lived;

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and as Zenophile resided on the Avenue Mont Royal, and Eloise near by on the Avenue L'Hotel de Ville, it is not at all surprising to find them acquainted—considerably so.

Now it sometimes happens that two persons, knowing each other well, fall in love. This was not exactly the case with Zenophile and Eloise; but then Eloise went more than half way in the matter, and thereby partly made up for Zenophile's unreciprocating lack.

Given a high station in life, with all its comforts and accessories, rather than the meagre one to which she was born, and Eloise, an exceptionally dark and handsome woman, would have ruled men as a queen does her subjects; beauty and symmetry alone preserving and redeeming her from a reversion to aboriginal type. This brunette of twenty-five was as emotional as her skin was dusky; though passionate, as she proved herself to be at times, it was of that gentle, appealing order to which men so often succumb. Zenophile was the exception. He drove his team and platform cart all day without hurrying; and he maintained the same pace in regard to Eloise.

She might be pretty—she might not; Zenophile could not tell you which. But Eloise could unhesitatingly tell you why it was that Zenophile was so good-looking; and to put the question the other way to Zenophile was like dragging dry land for fishes.

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The existence that Eloise led in nowise differed from that of her neighbors. She lived precisely the same kind of a life, subsisted on the same kind of foods, entered into the same kind of enjoyments, and endured the same amount of privation. Yet, in spite of coarse handling, Nature turned out an exquisite piece of work.

A depth of rich, warm coloring dyeing the skin of a woman between medium and medium-tall, the cherry-red lips of whose small regular mouth showed as if painted against the white even teeth behind; ears, hands and feet of corresponding dainty sizes; hair, in a heavy roll back from the forehead, as glossy black as a raven's wing, and large lustrous eyes of the same color—this was Eloise. This was the woman who, dressed in cheap clothes of fashionable pretence and gay hues, scorned a dozen men that she might plead by look in vain with the thirteenth.

Now Zenophile, the shade of an Indian in tan, was the build of a man that does the eye good to look upon; and although dark of hair and eyes, and with sun-tanned face and hands, was yet fair of skin—a man of great heart, few faults, sober mien, and good judgment, except when erring on what usually turned out to be the right side.

On the Rue Sanguinet the Hospice Auclair was in course of erection, in the neighborhood where Zenophile lived, and thither he conveyed stone from

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the quarries. It was also about this time that His Grace the Archbishop had acceded to the petition of the faithful in a rapidly growing community, and a grand new church was being built at the corner of Avenues Laval and Roy, to serve for the wants of the new parish just created out of the old one of L'Enfant Jesus. To this spot as well did Zenophile convey stone as required, and in his comings and goings between the two places in the course of each week, it would happen that different days saw him pass up and down different streets—sometimes down Rue Sanguinet, returning light by way of Rue Drolet; or down Rue Cadieux, and back by the Avenue l'Hotel de Ville. And sometimes when he passed up the latter street, comfortably seated for a smoke while the horses lazily made their way back to the quarries again, Eloise would be at the window as he went by, till it finally came to pass that Zenophile, who was not blind, and felt for the girl that he had nothing of his heart to give her, one day made up his mind that, greatly as he had shrunk from such a course before, his duty was plain that he should now speak and show how hopeless it all was. He had felt for no particular woman as yet, had Zenophile, and no woman would claim him as hers until Zenophile knew his own mind, and when an equivalent return from him in affection gave her the right to do so.

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Now it so happened that on this one particular day the door opened and Eloise came out at the moment of Zenophile's passing. The morning was sunny and warm, but the smile of Eloise surpassed both of these elemental conditions. Zenophile acknowledged the greeting by awkwardly touching his cap; but the spark at last was lit that flew into what tinder the human breast affords, and, instead of warming himself by it, Zenophile grew cold to think of what his whole-souled nature prompted him to carry into effect without delay. Emptying his pipe, he put it back into his pocket; and as for driving, the horses were their own masters so far as a pair of reins wound round a small iron-socketed stick was concerned. Zenophile reflected hard and fast, but no matter how many thoughts he had, or where they led him, all pointed to one conclusion in the end: Eloise must be immediately told that it was no use. Zenophile heaved a big generous sigh—and faced his predicament determinedly. Eloise must be seen that day, and the thing settled; the sooner the better for them both. Then he would breathe with a freer conscience. How this was to be accomplished was a puzzle at first, but by doggedly pondering the matter over he apparently held the solution when noon came. It was better, thought he, to have done with the matter at once and forever, than allow it to go on indefinitely.

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On Sunday Eloise had many callers, and Zenophile could not bring himself to interfere; but on week days he could do as he pleased. He would therefore sacrifice half a day's pay—her sake was worth it. And so it was settled—to-day, or not at all.

With his simple mid-day meal over, Zenophile arose from the table, procured a sheet of common writing paper and an envelope from his sister Ursule, and laboriously composed the following note:

“ Dear Miss Eloise,—The day is warm and the horses the better of resting. I will walk with you on the mountain this afternoon if you meet me at three o'clock at the north corner of the Hotel Dieu by Rue St. Urbain. There is something that should be said that chafes me till I say it.

“ ZENOPHILE BROUILLARD.”

The one blot Zenophile made he magnanimously allowed to dry and remain; and after—in the pains-taking manner of unaccustomedness—folding, closing and addressing the enveloped epistle, he paid a boy a cent to deliver it. Then he discarded his working clothes for a suit of black—his sex and nationality being decidedly fond of sable garments—and, having dressed with extra neatness, finally donned a black soft felt Fedora hat, and left the house two hours ahead of the time specified in his note.

Zenophile had a bashful time of it in the walk from the Hotel Dieu to the cool spot under the

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mountain-side where he found a bench. As for Eloise, she never appeared, never proved, more bewitching ; and old Mount Royal looked down upon the twain in their leafy, secluded bower, and no doubt quietly chuckled to itself to think of the foolhardiness of some men.

Ah, old Mount Royal ! Beautiful in each spring's verdant awakening ; a flowering lap in summer-time ; a gorgeous spectacle clothed in autumnal tints ; and silently majestic beneath the snows of winter. If its stones and trees, hills and vales, could but cry out and tell what they know, what a depth of romance would be woven in the tales thus told ! From the days when the untutored and unmolested Indian surveyed the surrounding plain from its brows ; from the days when that hardy and intrepid mariner, Jacques Cartier, first landed at Hochelaga, and so grandly named the mountain he saw in honor of his king, Francis I. ; from the days when, almost within sight of it, brave Dulac des Ormeaux and his few heroic companions fought as the centre of a circling hell that only redskin savagery knew how to plan and perpetrate as warfare ; from the days when an infant colonial city at its base saw the French and English nobility plant the standards of their kings on its soil, rally around them the cherished transferred customs of their separate courts, and embellish peace with all the heroism

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and daring of which these two races were so historically capable; and from the days when the flower of the aristocracy of France and England united in preserving Canada for all time to themselves and the world's greatest empire—throughout all these days has old Mount Royal contemplated the moves of fortune and tragedy on a chessboard by the St. Lawrence, that has since become the site of one of America's most populous cities. And on the slopes of this same old Mount Royal has man battled for cause whilst empires looked on; wooed, won, or lost in the game of ambition and fame, and toyed and pleaded for the hand of woman within its groves in the civilized fashion and language of three and a half centuries. And to-day old Mount Royal, but not quite the same old Mount Royal, witnesses, with its significant ancient and modern air, one more in a long list of strange wooings.

Zenophile was evidently not altogether mind-easy when the pair sat down on one of those numerous seats the unwary are always stumbling upon when roving the mountain, and began fumbling at his (presumably) gold watch-chain (you have no idea what a fine gentleman exists in the average French-Canadian son of toil until you see him on Sundays or holidays). Short as had been the walk from the Hotel Dieu to this (also presumably) coign of vantage, Zenophile could frame nothing in

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speech but little things—to now come to a full stop. Nor was it reassuring for him to intuitively feel that Eloise was as self-possessed as he was embarrassed. But Eloise would help him out—as she thought—and, feeling in her bosom, she produced his letter and kissed it. Zenophile flushed beneath his tan, and the palms of his hands grew moist.

“There is something you want to say to me,” said Eloise, in the well-nigh irresistible way of a woman. “What is it, Zenophile?”

“It is not what you expect,” dropping his watch-chain as thus brought to bay, that he might bend forward and rest his arms on his knees and stare hard at the ground.

“*Mon Dieu!*” crumpling the letter so that it crackled. “Explain!”

The new ring in her voice made Zenophile hesitate, but only for a moment—the next forced his reply.

“It can never be, Eloise. I am not yours.”

An imperative hand was laid upon his arm, and a low demanding voice fused the three words it uttered into one—

“You love another?”

“No,” said Zenophile, truthfully, and the look accompanying the word was corroborative.

“Then,” imperiously, “why have you brought me here to tell me this?”

“Because,” looking at the ground again, “there



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is Adolphe, and Maxime, and Cesaire, and Alexis, all good men that would sell their lives for you, and I would put myself right with you for their sakes."

"Your reason?" scornfully. "Come—give me your reason. Why should I turn to them after you?"

Big honest Zenophile looked up, surprised.

"Because if you cannot have me, you will take another."

Zenophile will never forget the look he got. He felt as a man charged with some great wrong he cannot understand. Eloise now dissolved from the Recording Angel of Fault into the Passionately Human.

"If I cannot have you I will have none other."

Zenophile's heart misgave him to see what he had uncaged.

"But," said he, "we are both dark. It does not go."

What followed made him wince as if under a lash.

"And what is that to the tinting of the heart? What is that when love colors the sight and dyes the mind with its truth? Why should you so coldly speak of such things when the soul is concerned? Where is your fire, my Zenophile, or are you made of the stone which you handle? There is not another woman in the world to give herself

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to you as I would. Nothing is too good that I might do for you—nothing too great that I would not attempt for your sake—and yet you sit there like the machine we just saw breaking stone, with words that crunch, crunch and stamp on a heart hard enough to break it."

Profoundly stirred, Zenophile sat up and gazed straight into the eyes of Eloise.

"I never thought it was so bad as that," he earnestly said. "It was to my mind that a woman is fast suited among men."

"That she is," with a proud flash and wilful misinterpretation; "and so fast that a woman is still devotion to her man among men when everybody else fails him. Ask yourself—what is there to compare with that? And once loving, she is ever the same—nothing can change it. If you, my Zenophile, if you were to strike me dying this minute, I would love you with the deed upon you till my last breath—I would love you even in death. Can you not understand?" and the impulsive touch here on Zenophile's arm announced a decidedly new sensation to him.

But the latter shook his head.

"I could give of much in affection," he slowly, even sadly, answered, "but not like that."

"But why not give what you have?"

"To whom?"

"Zenophile, why do you play with words? To

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the one you should. Is it right for you to steal?"

"*Comment?* I do not understand."

"You stole from me."

"*Batême!* What do you mean?"

"My heart. Oh, you of little wit!"

"But—I could not help that."

"Then give it back to me."

"*Misericorde!* How can I?"

"Then I must have yours instead."

Zenophile stared as if he saw a ghost instead of a woman whose soul shone out of two luminous black eyes.

"Come," she continued, "you surely cannot draw back from doing one or the other. It is not in you to be deaf to such a call, my Zenophile—you with a nature that will neither whip a horse nor harm a fly. Then why must you wound a woman in a way that scars her for life? I am not Eloise without your heart or mine. But oh, Zenophile, let it be yours!"

The pleader stopped here. She would have said more, but the quivering voice broke of its own accord, and while the eyes of Eloise slowly filled with tears, her hand nervously crept up and down Zenophile's coatsleeve. Her whole world was now at stake, and the fortunes of warring love had tossed poor Eloise into the vortex of distressing suspense.

Zenophile became sorely smitten in thought. This was not the afternoon's programme that he

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had anticipated, and he felt balked. What rash tenderness was this of his that had bodily submerged him beneath the waters of Awful Fix? He had trusted to himself and common-sense to nip in the bud a mistake that, unchecked, must inevitably have bred great pain—with this result. And if thus unable to master the fancied little, how much less able was he to cope with the astounding much?—especially with a new factor now introduced—grief. To assuage grief is to relieve pain, and where in the first place he had but one element to deal with, he now had two. And Zenophile would far sooner have preferred to stop a maddened runaway team than attempt, by comforting, to dry up a woman's tears. But Zenophile never lost faith in himself, and heroically made up his mind to see the thing through to the bitter end. Heartily did he wish himself back hauling stone again; but a fire had been built for nothing, and he set to work to put it out.

Nor must we mistake the character of a man who was without a thought of swearing at his present luck.

“Listen, Eloise,” he controlled himself to say. “If you must weep, do it from me. I come of my own will to put you straight with yourself, that you should know it is useless to think of me any more in the way you do; and instead of thanking me for my good intention you must charge

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me with wrong and selfishness and cruel-doing. It is not generous or right for you to say such things, Eloise, but anguish has deluded you and you have uttered the false without knowing it. Tears but blur the vision, and a quick blurring of good sight often affects the other senses. My heart bleeds for you, Eloise, but I cannot help you. It was for your sake alone I invited you out to hear the truth. Ah, *bon Dieu!* how you do take it to heart. Come, *pauvre fille*, compose yourself; it will all shortly pass away, and you shall smile and be the Eloise of old again. Command yourself, and be *une brave*. You know not how much I feel for you."

As may be supposed, Eloise was crying by this time—quietly sobbing to herself with her head and arms resting on the back of the seat, but Zenophile's concluding assertion raised her tear-stained face to his in an instant.

"I do not want your pity," she said, rolling pride, contempt, vehemence, indignation and her adoring into one, "but your love; and if you will not give me of that, then do not heap further torture upon me and spurn me with idle speech."

Zenophile's face plainly indicated that he was nonplussed.

"You do *not* feel for me," continued the other, with rapid and cutting emphasis, "or you would not bring me here to-day to shame me in the sight of both of us."

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“But I do feel for you,” was all Zenophile could say.

“Then,” sitting bolt upright, and bestowing a look on him that made him tingle to his finger-tips, “there must be something more behind it. Oh, Zenophile”—excitedly clasping her hands—“if it should be that you do love me, and do not know it!”

This was a possibility brought home to Zenophile that seemed to rout him from sane possession of himself. What if it should be so? Calm thinking was out of the question—his thoughts jostled him from the centre of reasoning gravity. Zenophile simply stared, therefore, as a man in a dream.

“Zenophile,” and the eager, trembling word was whispered so close to him that he started. Yes, she had come nearer, very much nearer. “Zenophile, tell me truly—tell me with our lives depending on your answer—what you feel like when I do this?” and she rested a little hand lightly and warmly in his own great rough one.

Zenophile was immediately plunged into a species of fascination. He gazed fixedly into a pair of eyes that seemed to mesmerically hold his own, and drifted so far away in spirit from a body left helpless the moment that nestling hand was placed in his, that both their voices seemed to reach him distantly.

Eloise burned her inquiring glance through his

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eyes down into the depths of consciousness, but Zenophile remained mute.

“What is it you feel like, my Zenophile?” And to Zenophile it seemed that he could see—what an anomaly, to be sure—the low, half-whispered voice feeling its way to him with the swiftness of light, up and down and over high mountains, leaping chasms and gorges, speeding across vast plains, and bridging rivers in jumps, till at last it found its way into his ear—“What is it you feel like, my Zenophile?”

And how strange his own voice sounded to him when he spoke—“I lose in power.”

“And now, my Zenophile?” and from his shoulder downwards she several times soothingly stroked the sleeve of his coat.

“I hold power, but a sleepy weight is beginning upon me.”

“And now?” and the hand she laid upon his brow began fondly brushing back his hair—(they were in the shade, and Zenophile had removed his hat)—“and now?”

Zenophile shut and opened his eyes before speaking, all in a drowsy way.

“There is that which I cannot express. You could fashion me as you would clay.”

The late rain has departed, and sunshine is breaking out everywhere in smiles on the face of Eloise.

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“And now, my Zenophile?” bending forward, so close with her head to his that he could feel her breath, and using both hands this time that she might pet and pat, and smooth and tap, in lingering touch, the tiniest part of his regular, well-formed face.

“I am again without strength,” hoarsely.

It was a light laugh, that of Eloise—so musical, such a contrast to her storm-swept notes of a few minutes ago. It came, and was gone.

“And now, my Zenophile, since you say you are chained,” and with his face between her hands she pressed her lips to his, and gazed with fearless beseeching into his eyes at short range.

Zenophile woke up. The kiss did it. He swept Eloise into his embrace as he would a babe, and kissed her on the hair, the eyes, and lips, as if she had belonged to him all his life. It is just as well we do these things in private, otherwise the rest of the world might suffer with a waning appetite.

And so we leave Zenophile folding Eloise to his heart—a thing he should have done months ago.

“You have chained and unchained me, my Eloise,” was all he could say. “You have made me see. I would kill the man, my Eloise, that now tried to come between us.”









